

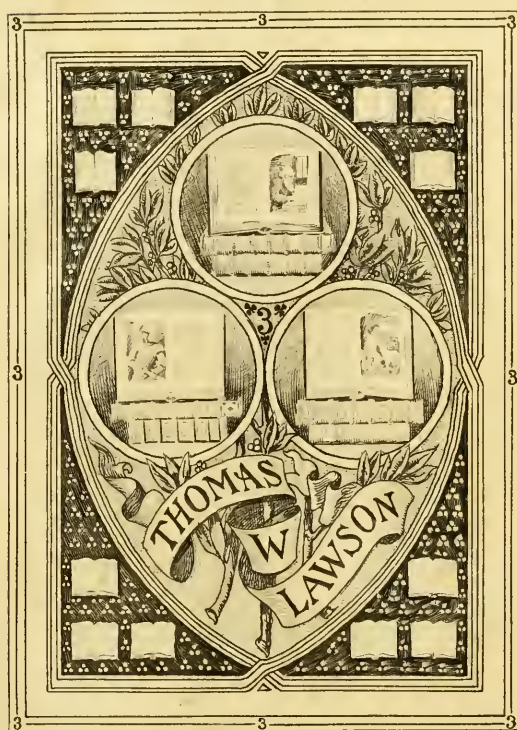




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THE
HAUGHTYSHIRE HUNT



The Meet—Arrival of the Duke.

THE
HAUGHTYSHIRE
HUNT

By FOX RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF "CROSS COUNTRY REMINISCENCES," "IN SCARLET AND SILK," ETC.



WITH SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE PICTURES ON PLATE PAPER AND
TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT BY

R. J. RICHARDSON

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THE HAUGHTYSHIRE HUNT.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE BINKIES TOOK 'THE CHASE.'

RIGHT in the heart of the lovely vale of Lambdown, a hard-bitten old fox-hunting Squire, Ralph Benwell, erected for himself, some two centuries since, a fine square house of grey stone, surrounded by a moat, with a huge range of stabling, and here, together with his six boys and girls, he devoted himself almost entirely to the pleasures of the chase; and, when in due, or, perhaps, undue course—for the hard Squire lacked but a few weeks of his ninetieth year at the time he was gathered to his fathers, 'full of years and honour'—his eldest son reigned in his stead, he worthily carried on the same pack of fox-hounds, the same sized stud of hunters, and the same existence generally, as his sire had done before him. He married a fruitful wife, lived long and happily, and was, in his turn, succeeded by his firstborn boy. But at the conclusion of this particular Benwell's reign, things began to go awry at The Chase, as the old grey stone mansion was called. A spend-thrift son in a crack cavalry regiment, a rascally lawyer, and a temporary depression in things agricultural, forced

the then head of the Benwells, most unwillingly, to let the good old house, and retire, with his wife and the younger members of his family, to the comparative seclusion of a small Continental watering-place, in which he ultimately died, without recovering any part of his lost fortune.

Just about the time that The Chase came into the market, a Mr. Septimus Binkie, who was always described by his friends and toadies—of whom he had many—as a ‘Merchant Prince,’ and by his enemies—of which there were few—as a tallow-chandler in a large way of business, had just come to the conclusion that, the number of thousands in the ‘Threes’ being sufficiently large, he would close the shutters of the shop in Billiter Street for ever, knock off the plebeian, if highly respectable, prefix of ‘Mr.,’ and blossom out into Septimus Binkie, Esquire, of some important place in the country.

Not that Mr. Binkie cared for a country life, but he was quite shrewd enough to know that he would find it easier to get into society—a thing which Mrs. Binkie assured him was essential to their worldly happiness at least, if not, indeed, to the ultimate salvation of their souls—in some spot remote from the place in which ‘Try Binkie’s Composites’ had been so liberally advertised, than it would be in the great Metropolis itself. And the Binkies, *père et mère*, soared high; a title indeed, for one, if not for both of their children, was quite within those fond dreams of future greatness, in which these worthy people were wont to indulge.

The *famille* Binkie consisted of one lovely daughter, and one unlovely son. The pink-and-white complexion, shell-

like ears, and golden brown hair of Penelope Binkie, had already brought the giddy moths fluttering round the candle—a rather unfortunate simile, perhaps, to use, considering her respected father's business. All these young blades, however, as not possessing the requisite qualifications, had been frigidly received by the parents, and then promptly sent to the rightabout, and it was plainly intimated to poor Penelope, that unless she were wishful for a life of single blessedness, she must 'look high' in the matrimonial market.

Travers Algernon Binkie, who was about two years senior to his sister, had just left Ringnose College, Oxford, and was ostensibly qualifying for the Bar; and if an assiduous attendance on the Hebes behind it could fit him for the ultimate wearing of a wig and gown, his father had certainly no right to complain of his negligence. He was, as we have intimated, rather an ill-favoured young man; his cheeks were red and somewhat fat, and an embryo moustache which his friend, Jack Dashwood, said reminded him of a cricket match ('eleven-a-side, you know'), seemed a perpetual source of worry to its owner, who was constantly exhorted by the same ingenuous youth to "leave it alone, old chap, or you'll break 'em off short."

Mr. Binkie Junior always wore garments too small for him, had sandy hair, and a big meaningless blue eye. He was generally dressed, not only in, but considerably beyond, the height of fashion, and affected a love for field sports which he was far from feeling. The choice spirits he had managed to gather round him at the 'Varsity, smoked his cigars, rode his horses, drank his port—Binkie Senior

didn't believe in claret—and abused him behind his back. They egged him on to do everything they wished for themselves, carefully omitting to pay their own share of the shot; considering, doubtless, that their distinguished company would be ample repayment in itself.

And now, with last week's *Field* before him, Septimus Binkie, Esq., put the tips of his fingers together, his elbows resting comfortably on the arms of his chair, and perused, through gold-rimmed spectacles, the following fascinating advertisement—

TO BE LET OR SOLD.—An old-fashioned, stone-built mansion, known as The Chase, surrounded by a moat, situate in the centre of the Duke of Haughtyshire's hunt. This commodious and highly eligible residence is approached by a long carriage-drive, bordered with noble oak trees, with lodge at entrance gates; contains twenty bed and dressing-rooms, with usual offices, four handsome reception-rooms, large entrance hall, etc., etc., etc.

Thus the alluring announcement ran on, whilst reserved, as a tit-bit, for the finish, came 'Stabling for upwards of twenty horses.'

"Ha-hum," observed the ex-tallow-chandler, dryshaving his chin as he was always wont to do when in any doubt or perplexity. "Ha-hum, I wonder now if the house would suit, or be too big? 'In the Duke of Haughtyshire's country' it says. Wonder if His Grace would call?"

Seeing her lord in that state of uncertainty in which she had always found him most malleable, Mrs. Binkie put down the crochet she was doing, got up and walked across the room to his side. Her quick eye soon fixed itself on the advertisement, and taking the *Field* she perused the par-

ticulars of The Chase in silence. Then laying it down again, she said, in impressive tones—

“Sep, this is the very thing for us.”

“Think so, my dear?”

“Think so? Certainly I think so. Why, the very advertisement smells of men in armour and baronial halls. A moat, too; why, Sep, I shouldn’t wonder if there was even a drawback and fortfullis.”

“Drawbridge and portcullis,” mildly put in Septimus.

“Fortfullis or portcullis, what’s it matter? you know what I mean, Sep. Now, just you take my advice for once in your life, and go down to see this place—what’s it called? ‘The Chaise,’ I suppose because of all that stable and coach-house room—what? oh, ‘The Chase,’ is it? well, never mind; you go and see the agent, or the traveller, or whatever he’s called, and then start off and inspect the place for yourself. It’s my belief we shall find it just what we want. And you might ask the agent, Sep—at least, not right out, you know—but you might just try and find out somehow from him whether the Duke of ‘Aughtyshire is likely to leave his card on us if we take the house. That is,” she added thoughtfully, “if dukes uses cards.”

“Well, that don’t matter, does it, Sal—Cecilia, I mean; so difficult to get hold of these new names at first, and it really is a bit confusing for a man after his wife’s been Sally for——”

“Now Sep, that’ll do. I’m Cecilia now. I’m sure if women change the colour of their hair and the number of their front teeth, it’s a small thing that they should change their names. Why, Sep,” she continued, as a glorious vision

of future greatness unfolded itself before her mind's eye: "Why, Sep, they might even make you a Master of the Fox Dogs."

"God forbid," murmured her husband piously.

The lady looked at him half pityingly, half sternly.

"You've no ambition, Sep, no proper pride, I'm afraid. You must make some sacrifice to the conveniences, as the French say."

"But I don't want to fall off a horse and break my neck, for all that, my dear. Well, at all events, I'll go down and see the agent—can do no harm, anyway. And after that I'll just inspect the house to see if it's suitable, and the drainage is all right."

"You mustn't be too particular about that, Sep. In the ancient old mededevil times I daresay they were not over nice about such things as drains. But ring the bell, and Mortimer will come and bring your hat and coat. Never spoil a good mind. You've got the money—you've got a proud and lofty bearing—a good figure still, and a good carriage——"

"Oh, I should walk there, my dear; I shan't want the carriage."

"Fiddlesticks, Sep, I don't mean that sort of carriage. I mean you've a distangay way with you, and if we only play our cards well we shall soon be county people, and you'll be made a magistrate and a captain in the yeomanry."

"I should prefer the rifle volunteers, my dear. They go on foot."

"Well, never mind that, now. All those things'll come when once we're in the moated house and the people all

round come to our entertainments; you'll see we shall soon be on *terra cotta*."

"*Terra firma*, Sal—Cecilia. And now I'll just walk down to Arundel Street and make enquiries."

And within a month of that time the worthy ex-tallow-chandler had inscribed upon his visiting cards—

MR. SEPTIMUS BINKIE,

*The Chase, Lambdown,
Haughtyshire.*

and was busily engaged with certain gentlemen of Hebraic appearance, in Wardour Street, arranging for a complete set of ancestors—four to the century—to be added to the Lares and Penates already collected in the old home of the fox-hunting Benwells.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOGGY DAY—HIS GRACE OF HAUGHTYSHIRE.

THE late Mr. G. P. R. James was wont, as we all know, to begin some of his excellent romances with the statement that 'a solitary horseman might have been observed, at eventide, riding across a range of hills,' or emerging from some picturesque valley or other. We might begin this chapter by observing that a solitary horseman could have been seen emerging from a morning fog, as dense as the English midlands can produce, in the month of December. But the parallel travels no further; for whereas the famous romancist would garb his rider in mediæval costume, with lovelocks hanging down upon his shoulders, and put into his mouth some such old-world quaintness as 'S'death! I have ridden far and fast this day,' or 'By'r Lady! but the light faileth me,' our own commonplace horseman merely coughs the damp, reeking atmosphere out of his throat and lungs, and ejaculates a word which we regret to know is even more commonplace than this particular equestrian was himself; he simply grunts out 'D—n!'

For Mr. Walter Sanders, who holds the highly honourable, if not very lucrative, appointment of second horseman to His Grace of Haughtyshire, has been sent on to the meet this morning, greatly against his own inclination—a pipe by the



The Fog at the Cross-roads.



saddle-room fire being much more in his line than threading his way through country lanes dense with a suffocating fog—to say that hounds would not hunt, and thus save waiting to all and sundry of the very keen division, who, hoping against hope, had turned up at the appointed tryst.

Banging their hands against their sporting breasts, and on their pipeclayed thighs, some five-and-twenty or thirty men were jogging impatiently up and down, by a sign-post where three roads met. To keep yourself warm in a dense, frosty fog—although it was not actually freezing—is at all times a hard matter. When you have nothing to do but wait, it is doubly so.

“Well, Walter?” shout half-a-dozen voices at once, in interrogative tones, as that worthy’s scarlet coat emerges suddenly out of the fog. Walter touches his cap to all, officially—to those who tip him, almost affectionately.

“The Dook, genelman, sends his compliments, and is sorry ’ounds can’t come to-day; ’is Grace sees no sign o’ clearin’ and ’e’s afraid ’arf the pack ’d be lost in this ’ere fog.”

“Ah, well, I told you so”—“Of course you couldn’t hunt with a fog like this”—“Could have come perfectly well if he’d liked”—“No chance of hunting, as I said all along”—“They’d have gone, right enough, if I’d had the pack,” etc., etc., etc., was the chorus that broke out immediately on receipt of the news, and then ensued the usual “Going my way home?”—“I must follow the lane to-day—should lose myself if I struck across the fields”—“Good-morning, sir, good-morning—well, better luck on Saturday,” and sundry other valedictory words, as the company gradually broke up and jogged off in different directions, in twos and threes and fours,

with here and there a horseman making a line for his stable by himself.

"Seen these new people at The Chase yet?" asks a tall, well-groomed man of his companion.

"No, I have not. But I am going there to call—well, as we can't hunt, I shall probably go there this afternoon," replies the other, whose neat, black coat, of peculiar cut, dark breeches and 'choker' proclaim him, at sight, a parson. "They're in my parish, and came to church last Sunday," he adds.

"I know. I saw them. Old man looks rather a—well, I should hardly take him for a sportsman, eh?"

"Hardly—hold up, horse!" as the ecclesiastical weight-carrier struck a huge stone with his toe and tripped over it. "However, they may be very nice people, and even if he doesn't hunt himself, he may be friendly to the sport. Hope he is, as a lot of that grass land over towards Thorpe-Herons goes with the house, you know."

The other, Sir Peter Mills, a J.P., and large landowner in that and the surrounding parishes, nodded his head.

"Yes—two or three very useful coverts they have, too. Pump him, Geoffry, will you, and if he's at all inclined to cut up rough about the hounds, we must get the Duke to call, you know. That usually has the effect of putting things straight."

For be it known that His Grace of Haughtyshire could be, and was, 'all things to all men.' The farmers in the district hunted by the Haughtyshire Foxhounds were almost all sportsmen, or at least favourable to sport. But here and there one would turn rusty, or make complaints, some reasonable, some very much the reverse: Jorker *would* put up an impossible post and rails just where the foxes invariably broke

from Scrapton covert, thereby 'caging' the field in most effective style; whilst Gumpage's wife actually hung out the washing on the timber guarding the only jumpable place, for half-a-mile, in the Swirlingford Brook. Remonstrance in either case had proved absolutely futile, until the Duke, as the final Court of Appeal, had taken the matter in hand, and had one day astonished good Mrs. Gumpage by cantering up on his way home from hunting, surprising her in the very act of hanging out the offending clothes. The good lady actually gasped for breath as the Duke removed his hat and made her a sweeping bow from his saddle.

"Good-day, my dear Mrs. Gumpage, good-day. Delighted to see you engaged in this highly healthful occupation. My huntsman, Will Ridall, tells me that you are in the habit of using these rails as clothes props, just where the brook is jumpable, jus—s—st at the par—tic—ular spot where it's jumpable. 'But,' I said to him, 'if the clothes are in the way, why not speak to Mrs. Gumpage about it? Mrs. Gumpage,' I told him, 'was a lady of whose friendship I was proud.'"

At this juncture the good lady's red face was a study; vulgarly speaking, she did not know whether she was standing on her head or on her heels, she was 'that flustered,' as she explained to her 'old man' when he came home that evening. What? had she heard aright?—the Duke of Haughtyshire speaking of her as a lady of whose friendship he was proud? She began to think that that little drop of sloe gin she had taken 'just to keep the cold out' had really—but no, it was such a little drop that it couldn't, surely?

And then the silvery voice went on, "And that I was quite sure that if the matter had been properly represented—

and mind you, Mrs. Gumpage, I mean *properly* represented—to her, that she would be the very last, the actual last person to interfere with sport in any way. Am I right, dear Mrs. Gumpage? Why, you are beginning to remove the clothes already. I knew it. Yes, I told Ridall he had not represented the matter in its proper light to you. I knew I was right,” and His Grace produced a solid gold case from which he elegantly took a cigarette, whilst Mrs. Gumpage, still unable to say a word, hustled off the flannel petticoats and Gumpage’s vests, and all and sundry the other mysterious garments, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made,’ which had been hitherto wont to get rid of their moist, soapsuddy environment by hanging on the rails of the only possible ‘take off’ to the Swirlingford Brook. Never again in the history of the Hunt were those rails desecrated by Mrs. Gumpage’s, or Mrs. Anybody else’s ‘washing.’

In similar manner, and with perfect suavity, did the Duke attack and vanquish Jorker, and the top bar of his objectionable post and rails was immediately removed, thus lowering the ‘lep’ by a couple of feet. His Grace’s manners charmed every heart, and if His Grace’s veracity was not quite as unimpeachable, it must be said, in common justice, that nearly all the Ducal taradiddles were told in the interests of kindness, courtesy, and fox-hunting: three things very excellent, and not to be surpassed in these or any other times.

On the afternoon of that very foggy day, the comfortable morning-room of The Chase was occupied by Mr. Septimus Binkie, his excellent spouse, and their daughter Penelope. Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie was entertaining two of his particular college friends, Mr. Jack Dashwood and Sir Thomas



The Duke and Mrs. Gumpage.

Fitzsquander, in his own little den upstairs, where long tumblers, cork-screws, and boxes of cigars seemed to form an important part of the furnishing of the room. These young gentlemen, fresh from their Alma Mater, had determined upon favouring The Chase with their presence over the so-called festive season, and making things generally lively in the ancestral hall now reigned over—at least nominally—by Septimus Binkie, Esq.

I say nominally reigned over by that excellent citizen—for, as my readers will have perhaps divined for themselves, Mrs. Septimus, if not exactly wearing the—well, in these latter days, I suppose we should call it the ‘bifurcated garment’—at all events, to every intent and purpose, was the moving spirit in the place. Mr. Binkie had long ceased to contend for the command of the establishment, and like a wise General retired at discretion—retired with bands playing and colours flying, be it understood, but retired, and that unmistakably, from a position which was no longer tenable. He was the nominal master of the house, but in point of fact he only played viola to Mrs. Binkie’s first fiddle in the domestic orchestra.

“Sep,” exclaimed the lady suddenly, “I do believe there’s someone driving up from the lodge gates—someone coming to call——”

“Is there indeed, my dear. What a nuisance, just as we were all sitting here so comfortably, too.”

“Sep,” this time in sharper tones, “don’t be more ridiculous than you can help. Isn’t that the very thing we’ve come to live here for? Isn’t that the way to get to know all the nobs?” (A strict regard for veracity will not permit

the writer to clothe Mrs. Binkie's speech in any more elegant garb—the lady's expressions were wont, on occasions, to be homely.)

“How do you know but what it mightn't be the Dook himself? If so, we must get Sir Thomas Fitzsquander down into the drawing-room to meet him; let His Grace see that we have some aristobratie friends.”

“Aristocratic, my love,” feebly murmured Septimus, who had received a sound commercial education at the Blankford Charit—beg pardon, Grammar School.

Mrs. Binkie did not deign any reply, but being a naturally sharp woman, she always stored such corrections up in her mind for use on future occasions. At this juncture she had eyes and ears, however, for nothing but the rapidly oncoming visitor. As he made the final turn round the rhododendron bushes of the drive, her keen eye fell on the clerical collar of the Reverend Geoffry Yarboro, with whom we have already a slight acquaintance.

“A Parson,” exclaimed the lady, in tones of disappointment, not to say disgust: “Only the Parson; well, I suppose that's better than nothing, anyhow,” she added, brightening up. “I daresay now, if we're civil to him and give him a dinner now and then—when we want someone to make up, you know, Sep—that he'll be the means of introducing us to some of the county people.”

“I daresay, my dear, I daresay,” assented Septimus, who, to tell the truth, was strongly inclined to seek the drowsy god, this dull, foggy day, instead of receiving callers.

“Penelope, come into the salong with your mother. Sep, you'll wait ten minutes, and then come in—not before, mind;”

and then this Generalissimo in petticoats, having issued her orders, sailed into the drawing-room, closely attended by her dutiful and lovely daughter.

In due course the visitor was ushered in by a resplendent creature in plush and white stockings. Mrs. Binkie was 'discovered' as the playbooks say, in a becoming attitude at the piano—not one note of which could she have played had her life depended on it. The usual greetings over, the lady of the house got on to the trail of the local bigwigs, like a Brocklesby Rallywood on a fox.

"Now tell me, Mr. Yarboro, what sort of a man is the Dook?—affable to his neighbours, or not? I suppose he wouldn't associate with such commonplace people as you and me, now, would he? Does he ever give you an invite to the Castle?"

Mr. Yarboro suppressed a quiet smile as he answered, "Yes, Mrs. Binkie, I am often up at the Castle, and I can assure you the Duke is always glad to see his neighbours."

"Is he, now? Well, I'm glad to hear that, anyway. Binkie, made his money in trade, of course—merchant prince, and all that—but we're not a bit proud, and not at all ashamed of being merchant princes and princesses, oh dear no. Now, I dessay you'd like to come here, one night, to dinner, and see our pictures and furniture, and all that, wouldn't you? Well, you shall. Fact is, we—Binkie and me—believe in associating with all sorts of people, and s'long as they're nice and agreeable, why there you are, you know. And I dessay it would be a little bit of a treat to you to walk round and look at—ah, here is Binkie. Sep, this is the Reverend Yarboro—Reverend Yarboro, Mr. Septimus Binkie."

The gentlemen bowed, and then Mr. Binkie, giving a slight preliminary cough, sat down on the extreme edge of one of the gorgeous satin-covered chairs, put both his fat little paws on his knees, and said abruptly, and *apropos* of nothing—"Would you like to see my pictures?"

Mr. Yarboro looked slightly embarrassed for a second. Then he said, in genial tones, that he "should be delighted to do so, some day;" whereupon Mr. Binkie's supply of conversation incontinently dried up, for the nonce.

Mrs. Binkie once more settled on the line of the district notabilities, and quickly got to work again on the affable Parson, who gave her every information in his power, and all with a look of infinite amusement on his face.

Presently tea was brought in, and, warmed by the cup which cheers but not inebriates, Septimus again ventured on giving tongue.

"Great hunting district, this, sir," he observed, dropping his spoon on the floor.

"It is, I am glad to say," responded the reverend gentleman cheerfully. "I hope, Mr. Binkie, that you yourself are a sportsman?"

Before the modest Septimus could put forth a disclaimer, his better half struck in with—

"Of course he is. That is, he enjoys all kinds of sports, though he doesn't exactly go out to ride after the dogs—hounds, I should say. But sport! why I should think he *did* like sport! You should have seen him, twenty years ago, in a skittle alley! As to the knock-'em-downs, why, when we were first married he'd come home with a regular armful of cocoanuts."

Mr. Yarboro laughed pleasantly.

"Ah, I see. Not exactly the sport we get here, but the true spirit evidently existing in him. Well, we shall hope to see you out with the Duke's hounds before long. Have you any horses yet?"

"Of course we have," replied the lady, bridling somewhat at this question, which she took literally. "Haven't you seen my carriage about the village?"

"Oh, ah, yes. I am afraid I hardly made myself clear. I meant hunters, not harness horses."

"No, we haven't any jumping horses yet. My son, who has just left Oxford—Oxford," repeated Mr. Binkie, for fear their visitor might possibly not have heard, the first time, "he was talking about a jumping horse——"

"Hunter," said Mrs. Septimus, in a corrective tone.

"Hunter, I mean—yes, he was talking about getting one last week. I don't know if he's thought any more about it or not, I'm sure. Of course, he's able to do what he likes, you know, sir. We don't limit 'im."

"He'll want some good horses. This country takes a good deal of getting over."

"Oh, I don't suppose he'll want but one—that is, unless he wishes to keep another for any friend as may be staying with him," replied Mr. Binkie, who, in the innocence of his heart, imagined that one horse could hunt five or six days a week.

"Well, anyhow," said the good-natured cleric, "if you send the young gentleman out, tell him to come up to me at the meet, and I'll do my best to put him in the way of seeing some sport."

"And will you introduce him to the Dook?" broke in

Mrs. Septimus, with more eagerness evident in her tone than she had meant to show. "Will you now, Mr. Yarboro? That would be friendly of you. I suppose he—the Dook, I mean—I suppose he speaks to you when he meets you out?—bound to, though, as the parish clergyman."

"Yes. He always speaks to me when he sees me," smiled the visitor, as he rose to go. "And one of these days I'll take an opportunity of introducing your son to him. Good-day; I hope we shall meet again before long." And so saying, he bowed himself out of the room, without having even been introduced to poor Penelope, who had sat in silence through the interview. Had Mrs. Binkie known that the Reverend Geoffry Yarboro was the Duke's nephew, she might not have taken so much satisfaction to her heart as she did in saying to her lord and master—

"Sep, I think we did well in offering to have him here to dinner, and show him the pictures and the furniture. It'll be a treat for him. These Parsons don't, as a rule, fare very well, and I expect a good dinner'll make him very friendly to us. They always speak well of the people they can get good meat and drink out of, you may be sure. And the Dook, you see, speaks to him when he sees him, although he is only a Parson. That boy of ours must buy his hunting horse at once, and go out with His Grace's pack. And the next thing for us to do, after that, will be to give what Sir Thomas Fitzsquander calls a hunt breakfast. Nothin' like that, he says, for making us pop'lar in the county."

But as 'Sep' was by this time comfortably asleep, Mrs. Binkie's last few words were wasted on the empty air.

CHAPTER III.

MR. BINKIE'S FRIENDS—MARMION, BY CAPULET.

It is only needful to mention to your friend that you are looking out for a horse, in order to bring a perfect hail of animals—most of them more or less unsuitable—to your door. Your friend has told his friend, who has passed the information on to a third; then, as a river overflowing its banks and spreading in all directions over the low-lying country around, so does the news spread, even to the uttermost corners of the land. No sooner had Travers Algernon Binkie intimated that he wanted an animal to carry his twelve stone of gooseflesh to hounds, than farmers, tradesmen, and dealers, both professional and amateur, flocked to The Chase, turning up at all imaginable hours, for the purpose of pressing their wares—mostly of the ‘lame, the halt (string), and the blind’ order—upon his attention.

Farmer Wintercabbage had ridden over on a six-year old which he had bred himself. It was clean on the legs, light in the middle, badly ribbed up, and had never been over a fence in its life, nor done any work—probably because it couldn't; and the reason that he hadn't sold it before was that nobody would buy it. This brute Travers declined. Mr. Karl Krack-whipz, a sporting Pole, had sent his groom to show him a hunter which he ‘had no use for,’ but as the groom had had a row

with his master that same day he took his revenge upon him by 'crabbing the deal,' coolly informing the intending purchaser that the horse was unsound in his wind—which was a lie. Mr. Jaggett, the dealer, had brought over no less than four different animals without success. But some three or four days after Mr. Yarboro's call, recorded in the last chapter, one of the gorgeous men-servants came up to his young master's bedroom (it was only 11.30 a.m., so, naturally that gentleman was still seeking repose), and informed him that a man in livery was waiting at the hall-door with a horse from the Honourable Mr. Crocker's stables, for him to see. Mr. Binkie, truth to tell, was hardly disposed to the trying of new horses, for he had not gone to bed overnight till very late, and the—the—er—well, the lemon in the whisky and water had caused his head to ache and his mouth to feel like the back of a Latin Grammar this morning. But with a mighty effort he pulled himself together, and feebly murmured that if the groom would wait half-an-hour, he would be down and look at the animal. The man, with a pitying smile, left the room just as Mr. Jack Dashwood entered it.

"What, ho, my merry Travers," he exclaimed, "rather thick-in-the-clear to-day? Got a kick in your gallop, eh? Buck up, my gay and festive sportsman, never say die; you'll be as right as rain when you've had a dash at the tub, and a strong Bohea."

Travers, from under the bedclothes, groaned feebly. His friend's hilarity was extremely displeasing to him under the circumstances. One always does feel more or less injured when somebody else is extremely well, and we ourselves are 'feeling like death.'

Jack then proceeded to ignite a peculiarly strong-smelling cigar, the first whiff of which roused the unhappy Travers to action. With a supreme effort he dashed off the clothes and rushed into his dressing-room, bolting the door after him. Mr. Dashwood blew a portentous cloud of smoke up to the ceiling, and then said to himself—

“Feels a little private this morning; evidently a trifle squiffy about the wiffle-waffles. Ah, well, he’ll be all right again in about an hour’s time, I daresay. Meantime I’ll go and hunt up the more or less worthy Sir Thomas, and then we’ll go down and inspect Crocker’s gee-gee.”

Jack Dashwood and Sir Thomas Fitzsquander had each brought a couple of hunters down with them, which they were keeping at their host’s expense, an arrangement which suited these two mercurial young gentlemen admirably, as, with all the capacity for enjoyment, and the most expensive tastes in life, their pockets were almost invariably empty, and the race of Hebraic money-lenders already knew them well. In fact, round about the vicinity of Cork Street they were distinctly better known than trusted. Both had arrived at ‘man’s estate,’ but neither, so far, at any other. Although they had only just left Oxford, they had ‘forgotten as much as most people know’ of the ways of *le monde qui s’amuse*, and were altogether very acute youths indeed.

To say that Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie knew nothing about horseflesh (except as retailed on little sticks, for the benefit of the feline race) would be putting the matter in almost too mild a light. His ignorance on this subject might be described as stately, and his two very excellent friends were, we may be sure, not slow to profit by it when they saw

a chance; so, in 'assisting' him to buy a hunter, they took particular care that the animal should be one which would suit their own riding tastes. They were, moreover, quite open to any chance that should offer itself, to pick up, like Autolycus of old, any 'unconsidered trifle' in the way of commission on a deal. Mutual jealousy of each other's proclivities in this respect had resulted in a sort of tacit agreement between Jack and Sir Tommy, that neither should try to sell Binkie a horse without letting the other share the spoil; and up to this period, not having seen any animal which either fancied for his own riding, they had amused themselves by 'crabbing' everyone of those brought to The Chase for inspection.

Still feeling very 'rocky,' as Mr. Dashwood expressed it, our young friend Travers Algernon struggled down to the front door in forty-five minutes from the time when he had got out of bed. He was there joined by his two guests, both clad in check suits of somewhat alarming pattern.

A rare good-looking chestnut horse was being gently walked up and down the carriage drive, and both Sir Thomas and Jack fell in love with him on the spot. A rapid wink passed between these worthies, and then they began the usual leg-handling, fault-finding, disparagement-cum-faint-praise, which is customary on examining a horse offered for sale, be he good, bad, or indifferent.

"Get on him, Travers, my boy!" exclaimed Sir Tommy.

Travers feebly shook his head. His nerves were not yet attuned to that performance.

"Had to put your hat on with a shoe-horn, old chap, didn't you? Ah, well, that state of affairs doesn't make you 'wentursome,' as your groom calls it. Well, shall I get

on the beggar's back, and show off his paces, eh ? ” And not waiting for assent, Mr. Jack Dashwood signed to the attendant groom to keep his charge still whilst he got into the saddle.

Now, to do him justice, Mr. Jack could ride ‘above a bit,’ and as he drew the reins through the fingers of his left hand, and felt his horse gently with his heel, instinct told him that he was on a good one. After trotting him slowly up the path, he turned to the groom and asked—



MARMION, BY CAPULET.

“Would Mr. Crocker let me lark him over a fence or two, do you think ? ”

The groom touched his hat, as he promptly replied—

“Certainly, sir. The master said as ’ow nothing Mr. Binkie could ride him over would do the ’orse any ’arm.”

Whereat Mr. Dashwood grinned slyly at Sir Tommy, and Sir Tommy ‘winked the other eye’ at Mr. Dashwood ; but the point of the observation, fortunately for Mr. Binkie’s vanity, was not understood by that young gentleman.

Taking advantage of this permission by proxy, as it were, Jack Dashwood, catching the horse by the head, turned him at the low post and rails running between the carriage drive and the meadow. Gathering his hind legs well under him, the chestnut shot himself clear of the timber, and well into the field beyond. Indeed, he would have easily cleared a ten-foot ditch in addition, had there been one on the landing side. His hind leverage was remarkable, and Jack was delighted. He cantered him across the meadow, jumping a brush fence into the field beyond; then circling round on the homeward track again, he took him steadily at a medium-sized brook within sight of his two friends. At this obstacle the animal acquitted himself equally well, and as Jack pulled him up on the far-side of the rails, the horse lightly blowing the hot breath from his dilated nostrils, the two young men on foot thought him a perfect picture.

Jack slipped off his back as the groom ran up to his head. Taking Travers Algernon aside, he said—

“Travers, my son, you must buy him; you really must. He’ll carry me—— you, I mean, beautifully to hounds. I’ll—— I should say, you’ll show ’em all the way, on a horse like this. He pulls a bit, but——”

“Oh, really! but I don’t like a puller,” exclaimed Mr. Binkie.

“Oh yes, you do,” answered Jack with an air of authority that could not be gainsaid, “this sort of puller, you do. He only gets hold of you properly; not a ramping, tearing beast at all; his power behind is wonderful; when he jumps it feels as if he were going to lift you smack over a town.”

“Oh, but I shouldn’t like that at all, you know!” exclaimed Travers Algernon in alarmed tones. “I——”

“Yes, you would,” answered his mentor, in a most impressive manner. “Yes, you would ; it’s not an up-in-the-air-and-down-again action ; it’s not that sort of thing at all ; just a nice hoist”—(Mr. Binkie winced)—“just a nice hoist of his quarters, which really gives one confidence that he’ll clear his fences in safety. You leave it to me, my gay young antelope ; this is the horse for your money. By-the-way, you haven’t opened the letter Crocky sent you. That’ll probably tell you the price he asks.”

Thus incited, Mr. Binkie breaks the envelope which he has held all this time in his flabby hands, and reads as under—

“WEEDS HALL,
“December 15th.

“DEAR SIR,

“Hearing that you were looking out for a really good hunter, I send you one to see and try, if you like so to do. My sole reason for selling him is that I am overstocked just at present. The horse—Marmion, by Capulet, out of a good hunting mare—is an admirable fencer, seven years old, and to the best of my belief as sound as a bit of gun-metal. The price is only £120, and I venture to think him dirt cheap at the money.

“Faithfully yours,

“ARCHIBALD CROCKER.

“T. A. Binkie, Esq., Junr.”

Mr. Binkie hummed and ha’d. He didn’t want to appear too eager ; it would look as if he had never bought a horse before—as the fact was. For want of something more original to say, he presently asked the groom—

“Would he go in harness ? ”

That smart menial smiled pityingly, as he replied—

“Our ’unters, sir, are not wanted for any ’arness work. We’ve got a old screw or two which we puts in when we wants to run a cart to the station, or the meets, or anywheres.”

“Oh, really,” replied our friend, in his weak falsetto voice. He didn’t in the least know what ‘putting an old screw in a cart’ meant. Probably some new method of propelling a motor-car, he thought to himself.

“Offer eighty for him,” suggested Sir Tommy.

“No, no, that’s no good,” chimed in Jack. “Look here, dear boy, I’ll go over to Crocky and see if I can beat him down a bit, eh? You get your father to sign a cheque—a blank cheque, you know, and I’ll get the beggar as cheap as I can. How does that idea strike you?”

Mr. Binkie Junior readily assented, except that he didn’t give Jack the cheque. The horse was then despatched back again, and the groom charged with a message to the Honourable, that Mr. Binkie’s friend, Mr. Dashwood, would drive over and see the owner of the good-looking chestnut in an hour’s time.

Punctually to the appointed period, Jack dashed up to the gates of Weeds Hall, as Mr. Crocker’s place was called, and found that gentleman—this being a non-hunting day—standing on his own doorstep waiting to receive him.

They went into the house and sat down. No time was wasted in preliminaries, and the two gentlemen got to business without delay.

“Does he mean to buy?” said the Honourable, coming to the point at once.



Jack tries the Chestnut.

Jack nodded assent. Then he added—

“At a price, you know.”

“I won’t take any less. A hundred-and-twenty is dirt cheap for that horse.”

“Say eighty.”

“Not a copper less than a hundred-and-twenty,” rejoined the owner firmly.

“Then I’m afraid it’s no deal.”

“Now, cards on the table, you want your bit out of it, I suppose, eh?”

Jack tried to look affronted. Then, thinking better of it, he said—

“Leave me a reasonable margin, and we’ll trade.”

“Ten?”

“No fear. Say thirty.”

“No. Tell you what I will do, though. I’ll *sell* the horse to you at ninety—— guineas,” he added, detecting a satisfied twinkle in Jack’s eye; “and then you can sell him to your friend. What do you think of that?”

“Make it——,” began Mr. Dashwood.

“Not a farthing less. Take it or leave it,” said Mr. Crocker decidedly.

And seeing that he was not likely to make any better terms for himself, Jack agreed, and the bargain was ratified and liquefied at one and the same time.

“You can have the horse as soon as you pay me the money. Not by cheque, please—hate cheques” (the fact being that the Honourable knew Mr. Jack Dashwood by repute, and was determined only to part with his horse against solid coin or crisp banknotes).

Jack sighed. This want of confidence struck at the very root of his commercial prosperity. However, he couldn't help himself, and agreed to produce the money on the following day. Then he took leave of the Honourable Archibald, climbed up into his—or, more correctly speaking, into Mr. Binkie's—dogcart, and prepared to return.

“He's sound, of course? You'll warrant him——”

“What?”

“Sound wind and eyes. Good hunter, in fact?”

“I'll warrant him sound wind and eyes. Yes, I'll do that.”

“Well then, I'll be off;” and nodding a farewell, Jack drew the reins through his fingers, chirruped to the fat, solid-looking beast in the shafts, and drove away down the avenue and through the lodge-gate on his way back to The Chase.

Going along, he had plenty of time to think over what he would say to his friend, and to consider how much he could reasonably hope to screw out of him. This was but a small transaction, and the profits would be in proportion. However, thought Mr. Dashwood, ‘little fish are sweet,’ and in the near future, perhaps, he would get some better chance of conveying a profit to his own pocket. Jack invariably spoke of this process as ‘trousering it.’

As the wheel of the dogcart crunched the gravel outside The Chase again, Mr. Binkie Junior, accompanied, rather to Jack's annoyance, by Sir Tommy, came round the shrubbery.

“Well?” said the former; “how much did you have to give for him?”

“Oh, most obdurate brute, this Crocker; wouldn't take a ha'penny less than——,” here ensued a momentary pause, whilst Jack gave a last fleeting thought as to how much

bleeding Binkie would stand—"than a hundred-and-fifteen guineas, and point blank refused to keep the offer open whilst I communicated with you. He said he had another man waiting at the stables with that money in his hand, ready to take the horse away."

"Really!" came the squeaky voice, in somewhat disappointed tones. "So you lost him?"

"On the contrary, I bought him—then and there—had to pay for him, too. And all in the sacred cause of friendship," he added airily, with one eye on Binkie and the other on the hawk-like countenance of Sir Thomas.

Sir Thomas shook his head and winked his eye—imperceptibly to Binkie, but plainly understood by Jack, who dropped his whipstock into the bucket with a bang, in order to hide his annoyance, and got out of the cart.

"So the horse is yours, my fine buck," he said, passing his arm through that of Travers Algernon, and leading him into the house, "and I think you'll find him one of the flyers of the hunt."

Mr. Binkie Junior didn't know what that meant, but thought it sounded nice.

"I'll go to Pa and get you a cheque, then, shall I?" bleated the hope of the Binkies.

"So do, my boy, so do. Short reckonings, eh? *you* know." Binkie didn't know, but waddled off, as well as his fat little legs and tight trousers permitted, to the paternal sanctum for the cheque.

Now it may have been a matter for wonderment all this time, why neither of these astute gentlemen had sold one of his own animals to his excellent friend. The reason is not

far to seek, though an explanation is certainly due. All the beasts in question were taken from Watson, on the hire system, and being rare old stagers, warranted not to go fast enough to make themselves warm, were not for sale even by the real owner. Such animals, though not, as a rule, worth five-and-twenty pounds apiece, are invaluable for the purpose of the lessors of hack hunters. It is very hard for the most reckless of equestrians to override them: the horses themselves so greatly object to the process.

As soon as their host was out of sight and hearing, Sir Tommy casually observed to Jack—

“What are you nicking out of this?”

The other stared vacantly at him, as though he had not understood.

“Nicking? I don’t understand you,” he said in reply.

“Oh yes, you do! How much was the commission?”

“There was none. Didn’t you hear me say that I bought the horse——”

“And paid for him, eh? Where’d you get the money to pay for him?”

“Really, I don’t see what that has to do with you.”

“Well, I do. Come, chuck it, Jack, what’s the good of playing innocent like this? I’m going to have my corner in the profits, so don’t make any mistake about that. How much did you make on it, now?”

“Only a miserable tenner,” answered Jack sulkily.

“That cock won’t fight. Well, I shall just ride over to Weeds Hall this afternoon, and see Crocker, if you won’t tell the truth. It won’t take me long to find out the game. But if you take my advice, you’ll own up, and shell out.”

“Did you ever hear of a certain Shakesperian character called Shylock?” enquired Mr. Dashwood with lofty scorn.

“Yes. Did you ever come across a gentleman of the name of Ananias?” retorted Sir Tommy.

And how this interesting controversy eventuated, none will ever know except the parties most concerned, for at that precise moment in came Travers Algernon with the cheque. In due course that interesting document was ‘melted’ and the proceeds paid to the gentlemen who had sold, and negotiated the sale of Marmion by Capulet, which proud animal thereupon came to dwell in The Chase stables and wear the Binkie horse-clothing.

“And thankgord ’e’s gone,” piously ejaculated the head man at the Weeds establishment, as he watched the great, banging chestnut walk jauntily away, swaddled up in cloths, hood, and bandages. “A good ’orse, too, but——, well, there!” and a world of meaning was conveyed in those two last words.

CHAPTER IV.

MARMION TAKES MR. BINKIE OUT WITH HOUNDS.

“COCKIE,” shouted Jack Dashwood in cheery tones, bursting into the sleeping apartment of Mr. Binkie Junior on the morning following the advent of the new hunter to the stables of The Chase, “the hounds—the Duke’s, you know—meet within two miles of here at eleven o’clock to-day. You must come out and try the new beastie.”

Travers Algernon sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

“Oh, really! I don’t think I’ll go to-day, Jack. I want to ride the horse quietly about the roads first, and see how I like him, and see if he’s quiet, and see if——”

“Skittles! ‘Faint heart never succeeded with lovely wunman,’ as says the Bard. Tommy and I are both going, so you must come.” Then he roared at the top of his voice—

We must go a-hunting to-day!
We must go a-hunting to-day!
For we’ll join the glad throng
And we’ll *allez vous ong*,
But we must go a-hunting to-day!

“Come, out you get, Trousers!” (‘Trousers’ was the nickname by which Mr. Binkie had been known at Oxford, on account of the conspicuous tightness of those garments.) “I’ll

look after you like a father. It'll do your liver all the good in the world—shake off the wiffy-woffy feeling that those overnight thirsts of yours always seem to create. Hout yer come!" and with a vigorous tug he hauled the bedclothes off his recumbent friend, and then beat a hasty retreat to the door in order to avoid the possibility of reprisals.

Thus adjured, Travers Algernon, suppressing a 'cuss-word,' grumblingly got out of bed, and walked across the room to look out of the window. The prospect was reassuring; the day was warm and sunny; everything looked bright and green. He had felt for some time past that he must soon make the plunge of appearing at covert-side for the first time, if he ever meant to hunt at all. As well now, as later on. And he certainly did want a chance of showing off the gorgeous new scarlet coat which Smallpage had sent home about a month ago;—yes, and the white cord breeches bearing Tautz's magic name;—ah, and those lovely top-boots! Yes, he would do and dare, to-day. The chestnut should bear him gallantly on—not too gallantly, but just gallantly enough, he said to himself, as a sort of mental reservation, for Travers was a prudent youth when his own safety was concerned. At all events, he would just ride out to the meet, potter about, hunt—if the spirit moved him—and come back home, up some muddy lanes, so as to get plenty of splashes on his boots and breeches, if he didn't feel equal to really 'going' with hounds.

Yes, he thought, he actually would do this to-day; then, ever thereafter, he would be able to tell his female acquaintances that he 'hunted with the Duke of Haughtyshire's hounds.' It sounded sweet music in his ears. So, ringing the bell for his man, he told him to send to the stables to say he would

have his chestnut horse saddled and at the door by 10.30. With much pain, he managed, under instruction by his man, to get into the snowy white breeches and top-boots, fastened on his spurs with the buckles inside—an error which was fortunately seen and rectified by his invaluable servant—and then he proceeded to struggle into the yards of spotless cambric which were to encircle his throat. Five minutes later, Mr. Binkie strode stiffly down the stairs, the clonk, clonk, of his long-necked spurs sounding most satisfactorily in his ears. Yes, he was ‘going to give the girls a treat’ when they saw him in this ‘get-up,’ and no mistake!

Jack Dashwood, who, with Sir Tommy, was seated at the table already, and demolishing eggs, ham, and game-pie at a pace which threatened sudden death to any one not blessed with the digestion of an ostrich, gave vent, as his host appeared, to a ‘view holloa,’ which would have put a Thames foghorn to the blush.

“ ‘Hail, all hail, my sucking Nimrod!’ as the cove says in the play, or if he doesn’t, he ought to, anyway. Sit down and make yourself at home; don’t mind me!” he exclaimed, kindly welcoming Binkie to his own table. “Have a devilled kidney and mushroom?”

Mr. Binkie made a somewhat light breakfast, to tell the truth. Much as he desired the kudos of hunting, it was not without a certain amount of misgiving that he entered upon his first day of it. Still, he made up for his lack of appetite by what Jack called a strict attention to his drinkytite, and fortified by the ‘jumping powder,’ and also by the fact that his two very knowing young friends would be with him at his *début*, Trousers was feeling fairly confident when the horses

were brought round from the stables, and the trio proceeded to mount.

“Whoa-o-o, my trim-built wherry!” cried Mr. Jack, as he caught hold of his horse’s mane, and made wild dives at the dangling stirrup-iron with his foot. “If you’re not, strictly speaking, a trim-built wherry, you’re at least werry trim-built,” he added, as he swung himself into his saddle. “Buck up, Trousers, and mount gently, or I’m hanged if you won’t split that elegant pair of Tautz’s, and ‘what would the robins do then, poor things?’ I think he’s made ’em a bit *too* Tautz. Now, Tommy, are you going to be all the morning learning that new pastime of dancing round on one toe with the other in the stirrup? Here, what are the rules? Can’t we play this game, too? don’t keep a good thing all to yourself, you know;” and amid a running fire of the facetious Dashwood’s chaff, the friends eventually settled down in their saddles, and were fairly under way.

The behaviour of the new acquisition was all that could possibly be desired. Marmion, by Capulet, walked along between the two ‘hirelings,’ as sober as a judge, and certainly looking the gentleman of the party. Trousers was proportionately proud. He even started a mild cigarette on the strength of it.

After a short ride through devious lanes, and across one grass field, the trio turned out of a gateway by a pond, and found themselves facing a crowd of mounted sportsmen and women, standing or walking about around a small, triangular piece of grass, in the centre of which stood a battered and wholly useless signpost. At the far side of the road was a little public-house, with a signboard idly swaying to-and-fro in the

light morning breeze. Servants were walking hunters about a little farther up one of the lanes converging on the piece of grass, and everyone was chatting amicably to his immediate neighbour, when our three friends appeared on the gay little scene. At almost the same moment, the Huntsman, with the pack all about his horse's heels, trotted round the corner of the opposite lane, and a general move took place as the cry of "Hounds, gentlemen, please, hounds!" caused everyone to sidle his horse out of the way. The pack was soon on the green, some of the hounds lying down, some taking a roll over, whilst cries from the Whips of "Steady there, Prodigal!" "Have a care, Harmony!" rose over the voices discussing the merits and demerits of the last good run, and the price of Russian oats, as compared with the home-grown and Scotch article, and completely snuffed out Mrs. Barège's sneering comments upon the cut of Miss Comely's new habit.

Almost before Sir Tommy had had time to direct his most languishing glance at Miss Comely's pretty face and figure, a further commotion announced the arrival of the Duke of Haughtyshire, driving a splendidly appointed mail phaeton with yellow wheels, bright steel pole chains, and drawn by a pair of hog-maned, bay cobs, which the Duke gave (or owed) six hundred guineas for.

To be quite candid respecting that most excellent nobleman, he was just a trifle—what shall we call it?—well, vague, respecting ready-money payments, and but for his eldest son and heir, Lord Gravity, who kept his respected father straight, not only in financial matters, but also at the shrine of Cupid, where the Duke was an ardent devotee, things might have 'gone sideways' at the Castle. Lord

Gravity was not a sportsman, but he was a very good fellow for all that. He had inherited his mother's serious and sombre temperament; was (fortunately for the estate) a born man of business, and took as much real pleasure in improving and keeping up the farms and cottages as his noble parent did in the chase—of either fox or female. Of the present holder of the ancient title, and of the presumptive one, it might fairly be said that each had his use, in his own particular place; and although so utterly dissimilar, no father and son could have had more real affection for each other. However the hunt servants were mounted, Lord Gravity was always ready to pay (for he had supreme control of the Castle establishment finances) any money for the Duke's own hunters, in order that he should be carried well and safely to hounds.

With a clatter of the steel pole-chains and a rattle of wheels, the noble M.F.H. drew up at the side of the road, and dropping his whip into the bucket, raised his hat with the air of a Sir Charles Grandison, in acknowledgment of the cloud of hats raised to himself, and the chorus of "Good-mornings" which gave him greeting. He was an immensely popular man, and he knew it, and honestly rejoiced in the knowledge.

A smart servant in the Ducal livery, at once brought a neat, but rather small hunter alongside his Grace's carriage, and the Duke, standing up, allowed his outer garments, a heavily furred cloak and a soft silk muffler, to fall and slip away from him, emerging in all the glory of 'pink' and spotless leathers. Casting a critical eye over the cleverly-built chestnut, he put his leg across him and was settled into his saddle in a moment. Small as the horse was, standing something

under 15.2, he had taken three or four prizes in open jumping competitions, and had a county-wide repute as a cross-country performer. The Duke owed four hundred and fifty for him.

Five minutes more law having been allowed for the late comers, the noble Master draws his watch from his pocket, glances swiftly at it, and then by a quiet nod to the Huntsman, gives the signal to move off. Away goes the whole cavalcade, the second Whip leading the way with a dropped thong in front of the most impetuous of the pack ; then the main body of the hounds, surrounding the Huntsman's horse on all sides. The first Whip, Tom Tribe, with two of the hunt-servants as second horsemen, follow ; then comes the Duke, chatting with his nephew, the Reverend Geoffry Yarboro, on his left hand, whilst Lady Lucy Silverton, one of the acknowledged London beauties of the past season, rides on his right. The rest of the field followed in close order, in straggling order, and in no order at all ; the extreme rear guard consisting of Nobbs, the colt-breaker, on a rough-coated, nondescript thing with a pony head, immense quarters and no shoulder at all—he was riding it with a big smooth ring snaffle, martingale (which alone prevented the brute knocking his rider's brains out when he threw up his head), no spurs, and a small ground ash stick ; Hacker, the sporting butcher, on one that had been given a holiday from the cart for the purpose ; and a round dozen of second horsemen and pad grooms. At that ever-to-be-execrated pace, a 'hound's jog,' away they all went, bobbing up and down, black and red mixed up in sweet confusion, until a general throwing up of hands and hunting-crops, and a chorus of 'hold hards' proclaimed the fact that they had arrived in the vicinity of the first covert they were to draw.

All this time, the new chestnut, ridden by Mr. Binkie, with his toes turned well out, and his elbows squared in what he imagined to be a sporting attitude, had behaved in a most



NOBBS, THE COLT-BREAKER.

exemplary fashion. He had jogged along every whit as quietly as the well-worn hirelings bestridden by his two Ringnose friends, and Sir Tommy had looked on, somewhat wonderingly, at the performance. He had satisfied himself from the outset that if the horse was not unsound—and he

didn't appear to be—that he must in some way be a ‘wrong ‘un’ with hounds, or the Honourable would not have sold such a rare good mover at the price.

Dropping back, and ‘tipping the wink’ to Mr. Jack Dashwood to do the same, the Baronet said to him in an undertone, as he indicated the chestnut with a slight nod of his head—

“Can’t quite make this out, can you? Seems quite quiet—doesn’t do anything—half thought he’d stand up when he got into the crowd, but he really seems as quiet as a sheep. We know he can jump and gallop, too——”

“Perhaps he can go, but can’t go on,” hazarded Jack. “However, if we find a fox here, and he runs towards the vale, we shall soon see. There’s some holding meadows there, not to mention the big bottoms we’ll have to jump, which’ll stop any horse with a weak spot anywhere about him.”

“Suppose Trousers breaks his neck?”

“Or more important still, the horse’s back?”

“Oh, don’t be so unfeeling. I’m not thinking about the horse, but about——”

“That I.O.U. for a pony he gave you last night? Well, yes, that is a consideration, isn’t it? Never mind, we’ll hope for the best. Hullo! what was that?”

For a faint whimper, undecided at first, but quickly swelling into something of more importance, had broken upon their ears. Then, silence again; once more the note is borne to them on the soft breeze, and now it is taken up by several of the hounds. A noise as of crackling, breaking dead under-wood, a “toot, toot” on Will’s horn, and then a general scramble to get through a small hand-gate, cigars thrown away, hats pressed down on heads, and that suppressed smile

of triumph on the faces of all men, a smile which takes the place of, and has to act as a poor, weak substitute for, the yell of delight which the whole of frail human nature would like to indulge in when the glorious truth is borne in upon it, and it murmurs in ecstatic tones—

“They’ve found!!!”

Yes, the Duke of Haughtyshire’s hounds had found; found, as the event proved, as good a fox as lived that side of the country. All present who were bold enough and well mounted enough to ride the line, were ‘in for a good thing.’

“Toot, toot, toot!” goes Will’s horn. “Toot, toot!” goes His Grace’s, and the hounds come tumbling out of covert with a burning eagerness which augurs well for everyone concerned, except the fox.

“Hold hard a minute, hold hard, gentlemen, please,” exclaims Will. “Let ’em get their heads down—half a minute, sir!” They quickly stoop to it and feather along—“tow, yow, yow!” they all speak in chorus, and, then away they go—no stopping to feel the way now, but, to a breast-high scent they race, rollicking away, over a fine piece of old pasture-land, bounded by a strong thorn fence on the far side.

“That’ll hold some of ye!” mutters Will, as giving an encouraging job on his horse’s ribs, with the big end of his horn, he turns for a moment, in his saddle, to find if Tom Tribe is anywhere near at hand. Then, not seeing him, he thrusts the horn into the breast of his coat, and catching his horse by the head, rams him at the weakest part of the fence in front.

“Hold up, ’oss!” as he gets over with a slight ‘peck’

on the landing side. Away he goes again, watching his hounds with ecstasy as, carrying a magnificent head, they stream like a flock of pigeons over the next meadow.

Very little behind the Huntsman comes the Duke. His neat little hunter jumps the thorn fence without the semblance of an effort, and His Grace turns to see that Miss Comely, to whom he had been speaking when they found, gets safely over. This duty accomplished, the Duke banishes all thought of what Jack Dashwood calls 'lovely wummun' from his mind, and sits down in his saddle to ride.

The main body of the field follow over, mostly crashing through the weak places which have been still further reduced in size by the 'tunnelling' process to which they have been subjected on the part of the bolder and more forward spirits of the hunt. Half-a-dozen are either down, or their horses have refused. Commander Clump R.N., whose stable is a curious collection of the most outrageous screws extant, is see-sawing 'twixt the Devil and the deep sea' over a piece of timber run through the hedge at a weak spot. Whether the gallant old Tar, whose pluck alone gets him across country on the wretches he bestrides, will fall into this field, or the one out of which he has jumped, still remains a matter of doubt. Then come a few of the second horsemen, and the butcher. Nobbs gets his young'un over—not without a reminder from the ash plant—and then, with the exception of the fallers and refusers, together with a few foot people, the meadow is left to its former solitary condition again.

But where, all this time, are our three friends, lately of Ringnose College?—thereby hangs a tale.



MARMION 'TAKES CHARGE.'

At the outset Mr. Binkie, owing either to a naturally retiring disposition, or the fact that some of his newborn confidence in his horse had been just a little upset by sundry shakes of the head, and snatches at the bridle when hounds found, had endeavoured to keep himself as much as possible in the background. He had already lost sight of his two friends, who, as a matter of fact, had both forgotten their promise of 'keeping an eye' on their host, and gone away in the ruck; and his one great desire was to keep out of the crowd and avoid, by every means in his power, any obstacle exceeding a foot in height. That Travers Algernon Binkie, and Travers Algernon Binkie's horse, were not in strict accord in this matter, was certainly a thing to be deplored, and though, up to this point, the rider had, somehow, contrived to control the ridden, 'Trousers' was now being eloquently warned that such a state of affairs could continue no longer. The headshakings, borings, and reachings, grew more and more emphatic, as Marmion by Capulet, realized that his compeers were passing him and rapidly going away, until at last, after a threat at rearing, with a wild snatch at the reins, which almost pulled his rider over his head, away he went 'as if the Devil had kicked him.' Blinded by the tears which streamed down his cheeks from the pace at which they were going, Binkie found himself within three lengths of the black-looking thorn fence, almost before he had had time to realize his position. With a hollow groan, he clutched at the pommel of his saddle, and prepared to meet his fate. Although the horse had bolted, the animal was by no means a fool, and instead of charging the fence in the high part exactly opposite to

him, he turned sharply aside for a slightly lower place, over which he went with a swish. The swerve would inevitably have unseated poor Binkie, but for his tight grip (with his hands) on the saddle. As it was, he found himself still 'there' as they landed, but minus his hat—brushed off his head by some straggling top-thorns—and his crop, caught by a binder, and dragged forcibly out of his hand. Finding his mouth free, the horse shook his head at the unlooked-for liberty he was enjoying, and then fairly laid himself out to gallop. Before they had crossed two more small fields with straggling and weak hedges, through which he went as if nothing was there, the flying Marmion had overtaken the half-dozen rearmost horses. These he went past, like a shot out of a gun. A somewhat wide interval separated him from the next brigade, and when he reached them, they were toiling over a small ploughed field, down to an open gateway. The Honourable Mrs. Joggletilt was first through this, of the group, but Marmion was close on her track. With a rush like that of an insane steam-engine, he tore past several to whom he should, rightly, have given way, and galloped up against Mrs. Joggletilt with such force that had not that lady been on her enormous weight carrying grey, and she herself almost the 'welter' of the whole hunt, he must inevitably have sent her head-over-heels. As it was, the impact was so violent, that it knocked her horse out of its stride, and the irate lady half off her saddle. *Being* a lady, of course there was no blue halo of bad language around her, but if looks could have been felt through the shoulder-blades of the offender, Travers Algernon would have fallen, pierced as surely as he could have been with lance or spear.

‘On, Marmion, on!’—to take a slight liberty with the poet of Abbotsford—and away he went across another grass-field; half jumped, half crashed through a weak flight of post and rails, which let him into the same enclosure as hounds were still running hard in, the first flight riding a little behind, right and left of them. The ground now began to fall rapidly as they neared the water meadows, situate in the low-lying portion of the vale. What with fright, and the awful velocity



THE BEATEN FOX.

with which he had been carried through the air, the unhappy Binkie had almost relapsed into a state of semi-consciousness; and the thought of trying to pull up his impetuous steed had never once entered his head. Clinging tenaciously to his saddle, and heedless of the cries which were levelled at him by the forward contingent, the Huntsman, and the Whips, as he shot past them, to “Hold hard!”—on he went, now on sound turf, now in the deep, holding, peaty bottoms, where the ‘plunk, plunk’ of his horse’s feet sent the water flying up into his face at every stride. A mile or two was traversed in this style, our hero, most unwillingly, ‘setting the field.’ Two or three of the smaller dykes had been duly negotiated by Marmion, an agonized “oh!” from the rider escaping him at each.

Then, as he reached and galloped over two of the tail hounds, who fled out of his way howling dismally, and each holding up an injured paw, the runaway's stride began to shorten. He was beginning to find that he had had about enough of it, but the blue blood of Capulet flowed in his veins, and as yet forbade the thought of giving in. The pack, however, running with a burning scent, their hackles up, and with their now beaten fox actually in view, again drew out from the pursuing horse. Blowing hard now, and labouring considerably in the heavy going, Marmion plodded gamely and doggedly on; then, right across their line, they confronted a post and rails, fringing a big, full dyke. Gallantly did the good chestnut gather himself together for his effort as he cocked his ears at the formidable obstacle. But pace, and the deep, holding ground they had been travelling over, had fairly pumped him out, and to the unspeakable joy of his master (?), discretion came to the horse's aid, and he began to pull up. Too late, alas! for although, as he got within a length of the rails, he resolutely planted both forefeet in the soft, slippery ground before him, ploughing up long furrows in his efforts to stop himself, the treacherous, clay surface gave his 'brake power' no chance to act, and sliding up against the top rail until all his weight was on it, the timber, unequal to the strain, snapped, and let both horse and rider helplessly and hopelessly over head, into the dark and murky waters beyond. Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie's first run with hounds had ended.

CHAPTER V.

MARMION AT A DISCOUNT.

“HOLD up, ’oss,” cried Will again, as his nearly ‘done’ horse blundered badly, on landing over the place which had proved fatal to our friend Binkie. “Hullo,” he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the chestnut, well into the middle of the dyke, whilst his owner was frantically trying to swarm up the far side in parlous plight. “Ben,” he shouted back to his second Whip, who was coming up close behind him: “Better stop and help Mr. Johnny Gilpin out o’ this, or I’m blessed if there won’t be a crowner’s ’quest wanted here: p’raps the gentleman can’t swim!” and on he went, with some difficulty shaking his horse into a canter again.

Ben disgustedly prepared to obey. Left to himself, the young Whipper-in, keen as mustard, would have let Mr. Binkie be drowned or be d—d with equal indifference, so that he himself was on with hounds. But he could not disobey orders, so leaving his smoking steed, standing with shaking tail and down-drooped head, to take care of itself, he walked down to the ditch-side in order to commence salvage operations on the Binkie person and property.

Meantime, the field had become somewhat select, and all really left in the run with a chance to see anything of the finish, were Tom Tribe, Jack Dashwood, who had bucketed

his hired gee in most merciless fashion ; the Duke, still going strong and well, on the neat little chestnut ; three lightweight men, and a lady—not Mrs. Joggletilt, whose big horse had found that the conjunction of heavy ground, a strong pace, and his by no means fairy burden, was not to his taste. Sir Tommy had come down a ‘buster’ at a bank and wattle on the top, which he had gone rather out of his way, in the early part of the run, to jump. All those going at the time of Binkie’s disaster meant seeing it out to the bitter end, or as far, at least, as their horses could carry them towards that desirable consummation.

Although travelling with arched back and tag dragging over the wet, peaty soil, Pug was not yet in hand. ‘As artful as a cartload of monkeys’ is an expression which applies to no animal more forcibly than to a hunted fox. What the average specimen of the vulpine race doesn’t know, isn’t worth knowing.

They were emerging now on to sounder ground, and soon after reaching a little cultivated and starveling potato patch, Reynard turned sharply left-handed up a short grass hill. By this time horses were getting rapidly to that stage known to the initiated as ‘cooked,’ and even Will galloped round the foot of the hill instead of going up it, in hopes that hounds would come back to him. This they did in less than five minutes, and as the Huntsman viewed his quarry again, his experienced eye told him that the end was not far off. Just as the fox reached the foot of the hill, he endeavoured to climb a low stone wall ; but he was too stiff, and his tired limbs refused their office. He fell back, and in another moment a rush of the hounds, a few fierce snaps, something bedraggled,



Miss Comely takes the Brush.

brown and furry, in the midst of the *mêlée*, and Will's "who-hoop!" proclaimed to all within a half-a-mile radius, that this good fox had died.

Tom Tribe was up and off his horse, hardly a moment behind Will. Then the Duke, whose good little horse had fairly worn down Jack Dashwood's useful old screw, arrived, and flinging the reins down on the chestnut's neck, he let him refresh himself with a hearty good shake; after which, re-adjusting his eyeglass, the Duke turned in his saddle to watch for the next comer. With nose nearly touching the ground, our friend Jack's hireling came blobbing along, hardly able to raise a canter; he was only just in advance of the lady, who proved to be Miss Comely; her horse was 'done to a turn.' Then three or four others arrived, some five minutes later, in a cluster, and that was all.

A cloud of steam arose from the group of sweating, blowing horses, as the obsequies were performed and the fox broken up. With an elaborate bow, the Duke presented that coveted trophy of the chase—the brush—to Miss Comely, who accepted it with a most becoming blush. She had ridden the line fairly and well, and thoroughly deserved the honour. But what she valued still more, was the fact that the Duke had addressed a few tender words to her at the moment of presentation, in low tones, unheard by the rest of those assembled there. For, be it known that Adela Comely had 'views' with regard to that fascinating nobleman, and but for the untimely interference of Lord Gravity at a critical stage of the proceedings during the last Race Ball, well—who knows what might have happened? But Lord

Gravity's watchfulness notwithstanding, Miss Comely had by no means abandoned hope of eventually posing as 'Your Grace.'

Now that the gallop was over and there was no more fun to be had out of it, Master Jack thought he would go back to look after his very dear friend, Binkie. Jack had caught sight of him and his horse in the big drain as he jumped it at a narrower part himself, but he had taken care not to see him 'officially.' It really is so annoying that one's friends always seem to make a point of coming to grief just on the days one is going well oneself. Mr. Dashwood quietly walked his tired beast back to the fatal spot, saluting Mr. Binkie with a 'view holloa' as he arrived, and beheld his bedraggled friend standing dripping on the bank.

"What ho, my piebald sportsman! you've been and gone and done it now, I don't think! Well, if haughty ambition *will* lead the field, haughty ambition must pay for the honour, eh? How's your feelings, cockie?"

'Trousers' tried to smile pleasantly, but only succeeded in producing a somewhat ghastly grin. His teeth were chattering with the cold, and the mud was fast drying on him in cakes. His hat was broken, and one boot had been pulled off in the sticky clay. Altogether, he was distinctly an object for pity. As to his horse, he was not making the slightest effort to help in extricating that good, if misguided beast, and poor Ben, unaided, looked very like stopping in the ditch all night in the hopeless task.

Jack slipped off his horse, and, leaving it to its own devices, made a close inspection of the fallen, and now stuck-fast animal.



MARMION IN THE BROOK.

"I say, old chap, I believe you've broken his back," he said, solemnly.

"Is—is—is—that a serious thing, do you think?" asked Trousers, his teeth rattling in his head like castanets.

"Well," answered Jack, "killing's rather fatal, ain't it?" whilst Ben, up to his knees in mire, supporting the poor beast's head to keep him from drowning, could not repress a laugh at poor Binkie's verdant innocence.

"How's he fast?" enquired Jack of the Whipper-in.

"Got his hind legs right down in the stuff, sir, and it do hold 'em, there's no mistake. Did they kill, sir?"

"Yes; and I expect Will and Tom and the hounds'll be back this way directly. They'll give us a hand; but you'll have to stop there till they come, for if you let go his head I'm blest if he won't commit suicide," exclaimed Jack.

Five minutes passed, during which poor 'Trousers' got colder and colder, and he asked his friend plaintively if he didn't think he could get a cab—they were five miles from everywhere—to take him home? And then, to Ben's great relief, and Jack's joy, Will and his subordinate turned up on their journey kennelwards. The Huntsman's quick eye soon took in the situation, and he said to Ben—

"That's right; keep his head up, and Tom must ride over to that cottage there and borrow a spade. Ask them two hedgers-and-ditchers to come over and lend a hand, too, Tom, and tell 'em to look sharp about it; it's time this 'oss was got out; he won't improve by keepin', you know, in this place."

And almost before he had finished speaking, Tom Tribe was shaking and heeling his tired horse over towards the cottage indicated, telling the two hedgers the need of their

services as he went. They plodded heavily over towards the little group on the bank, and by the time they had reached it, Tom rode back with a sharp spade over his shoulder.

“Now we shan’t be long,” quoth Mr. Jack Dashwood, as he seized the spade from the Whipper-in and prepared to cautiously descend the greasy bank. The words were prophetic as far as his own immediate fate was concerned, for, his heels slipping away from under him, he sprawled on his back beside the fallen horse, the spade flying out of his hand as he fell. Amid the laughter of the rest, he scrambled up again, and Tom Tribe, who had dismounted and again given his horse a liberty which the poor beast did not look like abusing, caught up the spade, and, aided by the two hedgers, set to work with a will to cut out the soil around the unhappy chestnut’s hind legs. Ten minutes vigorous labour cleared the way for a successful struggle on the part of Mr. Binkie’s new purchase, and with a mighty heave he got clear of the sticky clay. Another struggle, a slip, and then yet one more mighty effort, and he stood safely on *terra firma* again; then he gave himself a shake like that of a big dog emerging from a pond, and began to walk away. Jack seized his bridle and exclaimed—

“Whoa ho, my bonny boy, you’re all right; I don’t think he’s a bit the worse for his tumble. Up you get, Trousers! and don’t forget to empty the half-crowns in your pocket into the hands of the chaps who’ve dug you out.”

Mr. Binkie, having complied with this request, was soon hoisted into his muddy saddle, and the whole procession of horsemen and hounds started on their ten-mile journey back to the kennels.

Travers was somewhat silent on the way home. He felt lugubrious about the disappointing behaviour of the new horse, though devoutly thankful he hadn't been killed by him. All the glory of having led the field, too, was dimmed, if not entirely swept away, by the painfully obvious fact that such performance was involuntary on his part, and that his hands had been grasping the saddle instead of the reins. Moreover, like many others whose supply of brains is hardly in proportion to the sum of their worldly possessions, he had a vague feeling that he had been 'done,' without actually knowing how. As soon as the exercise of jogging along had put a little life and warmth into his chilled frame he said to Jack, riding along at his side—

"I say, you know, if this is a bolter, why, he ain't quiet to ride, is he? and so I shall return him to this chap, Crocker, you know, and ask for my money back."

"Do—and I'll bet you tuppence you don't get it!" responded Jack promptly.

"Oh, really!" came in the high falsetto, "but that's not fair, you know, is it?"

And just then, for the first time, it occurred to Mr. Jack Dashwood that things might be made a little awkward for him personally, if Travers Algernon made any fuss, as he, Jack, had *bought* the horse of Crocker, at the suggestion of that astute gentleman, and therefore that he himself was the actual seller (and perhaps the 'sold') in the transaction. Evidently Crocker had planted him with a determined bolter. If Binkie complained about the horse to Crocker, Crocker would, of course, disclaim any responsibility in the matter, morally or legally, and refer Mr. Binkie to Mr. Jack Dashwood himself.

After hurriedly reviewing the facts of the case, Jack came to the conclusion that he had better try to gloss over the horse's behaviour on this occasion, as an isolated instance though instinct told him that Marmion by Capulet, was in all human probability, one of the 'incorrigibles' of the world.

"I wouldn't worry about it, if I were you, Trou-Trous. I believe he's a dooced good horse—must be, in fact, to go as he did with you, to-day. He can gallop and jump and stay—can really go on, you know, and——"

"Oh really," squeaked Binkie as before, "but I can't stop him when he goes on, you know——"

"Oh, rubbish! horse is fresh to you—new rider, and all that sort of thing; you let me ride him, or better still, let Tommy ride him, next Saturday, and then see how he goes. At all events, if the worst comes to the worst, you can always send him up to the hammer. Horse like that is sure to make a lot of money at Tatt's or Aldridge's. Don't you trouble yourself, it's all right. Besides you are going home covered with glory——"

"And mud!" squeaked Travers, ruefully.

"Oh, blow the mud! what's that matter? it's all in the day's work."

"Oh, really! but I feel so stiff, and so sore—and—and—well, the saddle feels so hard, you know, and I don't seem to think I shall ever be able to sit down again," and poor Travers looked as if he were seriously inclined to weep.

"Well, have your dinner off the mantelpiece, then! That'll be all right. And now let's jog along; I'm getting cold."

"Yes; but I can't jog along! It's really too——"

"Very well then, I will. You come on as slow as you

like, and I'll tell 'em to get the tea and muffins ready for you. Ta-ta!" And Mr. Dashwood heel'd the old crow he was riding into increased activity, until he shovelled along at the best pace his stiffened limbs would admit of.

After going less than a quarter of a mile, he overtook and passed the Duke and Adela Comely, enjoying a most delightful *tête-à-tête* as they rode home together. Miss Comely was clothed in smiles (and, of course, all the customary addenda of a *fin-de-siècle* equestrienne), whilst the Duke, freed from the thrall of Lord Gravity's watchful guardianship, was, as Tom Tribe afterwards described it to his 'missus,' 'carryin' on somethin' awful' with her. The Duke was doubly pleased because Sanders, with his second horse, having missed him, the new little hunter had carried him gallantly throughout the run, from start to finish; and secondly, that kind Fate had dropped him in the same field as a pretty girl, with whom he could ride home and flirt to his heart's content. And His Grace of Haughtyshire was a past master in the art of flirtation. He was also handsome, well preserved, eligible, and, what all girls of sense highly appreciate, a bold, resolute horseman. The only alloy to the Duke's present happiness was the thought that he would surely have to face a mild but searching cross-examination on the part of his son and heir at dinner that evening, as to whom he had been talking and riding with during the day.

Jack raised his hat and passed on, leaving this pair of turtle-doves the road to themselves, again. A couple of miles farther on, he fell in with his friend, Sir Tommy, who had managed to lame his horse in the fall at the bank, already spoken of, as well as bark his own nose, and secure a very

fine specimen of what is known in the vulgar tongue as a 'black eye.'

"What ho, Tomaso ! you look as if you'd fallen down and trodden on yourself ! Been a mucker ?"

"You've guessed it in once," replied the other sententiously. "I have been a mucker—an almighty mucker, and no error. The silly fool——"

"Who ? you or the horse ?"

"Shut up. The silly fool half refused, and then tried to jump it ; came down a buster, and we rolled over together. And now the beggar's lame."

"It don't matter. I've got you a mount for Saturday ; Trousers's new gee. He's a clinker, but he sailed with Trou-Trous, carried him all over the place, jolly nearly to where we killed——"

"Oh, you did kill ?" interrupted Tommy, looking very disappointed. (Well, it is disappointing, isn't it, to come down in the early part of a run, just as the fun's beginning, and then to hear that your friends have had a good gallop, and wound up with a kill ?)

"Yes. Ripping gallop, and killed him in those peaty meadows. Well, the gee put poor old Trousers down in a ditch near the finish, and we had to dig him out with a spade ; the horse, I mean ; not Trousers. But he is a devilish good horse, I can tell you, and if he had a man on his back, would be the best hunter in the county. But Trousers !—well, there you are, you know ! And so I at once suggested that he should let you ride the horse next time."

Sir Tommy looked at his friend suspiciously. Self-effacement was hardly one of Jack Dashwood's prominent qualities.

“Why not you?” he asked quickly.

“Me? oh—er—well, because I didn’t exactly want a mount that day, don’t you know. And I thought——”

“There’s something pretty wrong about the beggar—something beyond his just stepping it with that ass, Travers—and you would prefer that I should break my neck, to taking the chance yourself.”

“Oh, infinitely!” exclaimed Jack, with engaging frankness.

“Well, then, why don’t you say so?” rejoined the Baronet.

“Why do you try to humbug me?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Jack, indifferently, “keeps one’s hand in, don’t it? Well, if you want the truth, perhaps the horse *is* a bolter—perhaps he isn’t. It might very likely be simply on account of Binkie’s feeble riding. But he can’t be very hard to handle, if that mug could sit on him all the time.”

“That’s true. Oh, I’ll ride him right enough; but really, Jack, I’d chuck up the attempt to act the unselfish and benevolent bounder, if I were you; I would really, or one of these days you’ll strain yourself at it.”

When Travers Algernon arrived home he found the tea awaiting him, and Sir Tommy comfortably ensconced in his, Travers’s, own particular chair, and smoking one of his eighteenpenny Cabanas. Mr. Jack Dashwood had retired upstairs, and was at that moment floundering about in a most delightful warm tub. Binkie swallowed a cup of hot tea, and felt better.

“I say, Tommy, you can ride my new horse next Saturday, if you like. He ran away with me, and put me into a ditch, you know,” and the meaningless blue eye was turned upon Tommy to see how he would take the proposition.

“All right, Trousers, I’ll show him who’s the boss, you bet your boots,” replied the valiant Baronet, with an easy assurance which he did not exactly feel. “I’ll put a bit on the beggar that’ll hold a ship. Don’t you trouble yourself about it.”

“I’ll give you a tip, Tommy,” said Travers, squeaking in a somewhat lower key than usual and looking confidential. “If he bolts with you, drop the reins and hang on by the saddle. *I did!*”

That night at dinner, Mr. Septimus Binkie enquired of his hopeful son how he had enjoyed his first day’s hunting. Mrs. Binkie wanted to know whether he had spoken to the ‘Dook,’ and Miss Penelope Binkie asked whether there were any ladies out, and if so, what they ‘had on.’ Travers, his head still swimming from his unaccustomed flight through the air, and the shake of his ‘downer,’ got rather mixed in his reply, and said, feebly, that he didn’t think he much liked hunting the Duke, and he hadn’t spoken to the ladies, and they hadn’t anything—he meant he hadn’t seen anything of what they had on—though he must, of course, have seen it, or he couldn’t have seen them. At least what he meant to say was, that——. Oh, please pass him the sherry, he didn’t feel very well, and he’d tell them all about it some other time.

Jack and Sir Tommy rattled on about the run in a way perfectly unintelligible to the Binkies. Even their hostess failed to extract anything tangible of what she wanted to know from either.

“Well, was Lord Gravy—the Dook’s son—was he out to-day?” Mrs. Binkie had all the sleuth-hound instinct of

the matron for an 'eligible' about her, and Penelope must be given chances. 'My Lady' and my 'daughter Lady So-and-so' would sound truly magnificent.

"No," said Tommy, "and his name is Gravity, not Gravy, Mrs. Binkie. Lord Gravity is a cove—beg pardon, a man who don't go in for sport, you see. His father attends to that department, whilst he does the business of the place."

And so, altogether, Travers's first day with hounds had not been productive of much in the way of furthering the aims of the Binkie family in the county. As to poor Travers himself, a much abraded cuticle was the only impression left behind for him.



PRODIGAL.

CHAPTER VI.

MARMION VANQUISHES SIR TOMMY.

THE following Saturday morning found Mr. Binkie Junior content to lie in bed, reading of the immortal contest fought between Mendoza and the Birmingham Buster, varied by occasional dives into Beckford, not one word of which could he understand. But having now got over the worst of his stiffness, he began to think he would buy a quiet, a *very* quiet horse, and go in regularly for hunting, (*Nota Bene*, that when the Binkies of the world say they will go in for hunting, they mean that they will go in for skirting, slinking through gates, gaps, etc.), and to what authority could he better turn than to Peter Beckford of imperishable memory? But never heeding that Peter's pages were as so much Greek to him, he plodded steadily on at the book (taking it, however, in homœopathic doses) in hopes that some of it would soak in. As we have said, he sandwiched in a bit of Beckford between two large slices of some world-famed prize-fight (the literature of the P. R. being a thing he peculiarly affected) and in this way managed to worry through the immortal tome.

Meanwhile his two friends were jogging along to the meet at Halton Gate, Sir Tommy on the redoubtable chestnut, gagged and half choked with some anserous arrangement of

bits devised by his enterprising and ingenious rider, whilst Jack bestrode his own, still stiff, hireling.

“Be all right when he’s warmed up with a gallop,” Jack had said in answer to his groom’s warning that the horse was not fit to go out again yet, with hounds.

Arrived at the meet, they found a fairly large field assembled, including the Duke—again in close attendance on Miss Comely—Mrs. Joggetilt, the Rev. Geoffrey Yarboro, Commander Clump, and most of the ‘habituals.’ The pack was just run through a small covert, for form’s sake, and then trotted off down Gorsely Lane, *en route* to Hindlinton Great Pastures. Almost as soon as hounds were put in at one end of the covert, a fox broke at the other, and went straight away.

“Now we’re in for some fun!” exclaimed Jack, as he rammed his hat down on his head.

“Yes, I expect *I* am, anyhow!” returned Sir Tommy grimly, as the ominous reachings and snatchings at the bridle began in earnest. Gag or no gag, Marmion by Capulet evidently meant business, and his rider had sense enough to see that it might be better to so far fall in with his humour as to let him, if possible, get off at once, and go along in front. He accordingly pushed his way through the crowd, and jumped a small hedge which divided the lane (in which most of the horsemen were assembled, all eager and jostling each other in hopes of getting a good start) from a large grass-field into which hounds had already begun to feather. Then they spoke to it unequivocally, and away they streamed. Sir Tommy had a splendid start, and, what was of almost equal importance, his horse could take his own line, clear of the crowd and its excitements.

Over the first field and over the first fence all went well, but the next half-mile was down some old pasture-land, with falling ground. Hounds were running as if tied to their fox; nothing held them for even a moment; the pace increased, and Marmion was getting his head down; the horse was blessed—or as his multifarious riders had always considered, cursed—with a fine flow of exuberant spirits, and despite Sir Tommy's best endeavours, he quickly got his head almost between his forelegs, and then let go such a succession of bucks and kicks, straight from his powerful loins, as first shifted, and then at last 'boosted' poor Tommy clean out of the saddle. He fell with that horribly unpleasant 'wump' which almost shakes the teeth out of your head—fell flat on his back, whilst the proud animal, who didn't seem to have even missed him, galloped straight on, landing over the next fence—a thick blackthorn—right on top of about half-a-dozen hounds as they turned sharply right-handed up the hedgerow. The fallen rider's discomfiture was a thousandfold increased, as on his ears broke the dismal howling of the maimed hounds, mingled with a volley of 'cuss-words,' hurled at his devoted head by Will, as he galloped furiously past him.

"Ar'm blessed if that brute didn't oughter to be shot! It's the same beauty" (only Will didn't say "beauty") "that run away last Toosday wi' that fat, tailor-looking man—little Johnny Gilpin, a' call 'im. Ar b'lieve now as they must be the new people oop at The Chase—and be d—d to 'em!" he added, as he flew the fence before him.

Sir Tommy sat upon the ground, and looked around him. At a little distance from where he was, the whole field went



SIR TOMMY 'CUTS A VOLUNTARY.'

past him, but not one offered to stop, either to enquire whether he was hurt or to lend him a helping hand.

“It’s the way of the beastly world,” growled the Baronet, in deeply disgusted tones; “the way of the beastly, ill-natured, selfish world! As to that brute of a horse—well, all I hope is that he will jolly well break his silly neck!” with which pious wish Sir Tommy proceeded to pick himself up and knock off some of the clay clods adhering to various parts of his person.

“Wonder where the devil I am? I don’t know where Halton is; how should I? I don’t know any of the beastly country, but, as far as I remember, there’s no village to make for anywhere near—nothing for it, in fact, but to trudge the awful four miles home. As to anyone ever catching that devil of a horse—well, if he’s caught this side of Christmas I shall be surprised, that’s all.”

And with these words Sir Tommy, heaving a deep sigh at his unhappy fate, prepared for the dreary four-mile tramp homewards.

Before he had gone a mile, his boot had begun operations in the way of removing the cuticle from his heel, and every step he took made matters worse. He hopped in order to relieve the suffering foot, thereby causing the other one to begin the process of heel-rubbing, too. Then he managed to catch his left toe against the spur of his right foot and trip over it; and after that it began to rain. Tommy’s ‘doll’ was verily ‘stuffed with sawdust, and the world was hollow’ on that memorable day!

When he had done about half of the miserable journey, a butcher’s cart overtook him, and he stopped it. It might be *infra dig.* for a scarlet-coated, top-booted Baronet to travel in

a butcher's cart, cheek by jowl with Mrs. Whiffin's sheep's head and Mrs. Onion's scrag-end of the neck, but the pain of his excoriated heels was more than poor Tommy could stand, and up he climbed, and in this inglorious and humiliating manner ultimately reached The Chase.

Travers felt more than delighted as he met his friend hopping painfully up the carriage-drive, on foot. He listened with great pleasure to the Baronet's dismal tale—Tommy would have said the horse had fallen with him—it is so much pleasanter than having to admit that you've been kicked off—but for the fact that the whole field had witnessed the catastrophe, and could have contradicted the assertion. When he had finished the recital, Trousers accompanied him into the house, and administered a whisky-and-soda by way of solace to his wounded feelings. Then he straightway proceeded to lacerate them afresh by saying, in his best and most vacuous manner—

“So I ain't such a bad rider, you see, after all, am I? In fact, I must be a doosid sight better rider than you, Tommy, mustn't I? because, although he ran away with me, I stuck on; and when he ran away with you, you came off!” and he indulged in a high falsetto giggle.

We regret to state—though we do not feel any surprise at the fact—that murder was in Sir Tommy's heart at that moment. Not a plain common-or-garden ordinary sort of murder, but a regular twopence-coloured, done-to-death-in-the-torture-chamber kind of tragedy. However, civilization has its advantages, and instead of springing upon his companion, there and then, and throttling him, he borrowed a tenner on the spot. Then he said—

"You must sell this brute. He's a confirmed bolter; nobody will ever be able to hold him when he's fairly started after hounds. Now, you send him up to Aldridge's. I know Sprange, one of the bosses up there, and I'll ask him to look after the horse, give him a loose-box and all that. Sprange is the best chap in the world. And perhaps we could pick you up a cheap hunter at the same place, eh?"

But Travers was minded to get a *safe* hunter, not a cheap one. After all, it was only a question of 'Pa' putting his hand a little deeper into his pocket. That wouldn't matter to Mr. Binkie Senior; certainly it wouldn't to Mr. Binkie Junior.

"No-o, thanks," he squeaked. "I want to get a nice quiet horse; something like the one Mrs. Joggletilt was on, on Tuesday, you know."

"That thing!" exclaimed Tommy in disgusted tones, "why the beggar can't go as fast as a man can kick his hat!"

"Oh, I don't want to go very fast, but I like horses that will keep still when you wish 'em to. If they get over the jumps safely, that's all I want," said Binkie.

"Get over the jumps?" repeated Tommy abstractedly. He was thinking of something else at the moment. "Sounds like an attack of the wiffle-waffles, don't it?"

"Yes," continued Trousers. "I want 'em safe, you know. I don't want my neck broken."

"And so say all of us!" quoted his friend. "Now I'm going upstairs to change. I suppose your blessed horse will find his way home, or be brought home. Why, here he is, with a gipsy-looking rascal riding him up to the stables. You

go out and see about it, and settle with him, there's a good chap. I'm just off upstairs," and Sir Tommy beat a precipitate retreat, as he invariably did whenever there was any question of payment in the wind.

Mr. Binkie put his hands in his pockets, and went out to meet the runaway. The gipsy-looking man touched the rim of his hat, and said—

"Ar've brought 'um whoam, sir."

"Oh, really!" went the 'penny-whistle voice,' as Jack Dashwood called it. "I should have thought that he'd brought you home!" and Travers gave a vacuous grin at what he thought to be a highly original witticism.

The man stared stolidly at him. Then he scratched his head and said, "Ar've lost half-a-day's work through bringing of 'um whoam."

"Oh, really! but that's rather nice for you, isn't it? Gives you a sort of holiday, eh?"

"Ar've lost half-a-day's work, and who's to pay me for it, ar wants to know?"

"Oh, you mean you've lost half-a-day's pay. I see. Well, I suppose Tommy ought, as he fell off, but I shall have to, because Tommy never pays anybody. How much do you earn, my man?"

"Poond a week, sir." (It was fourteen shillings really, but the horny-handed son of toil was not particular to a 'stretcher' here and there, whenever anything was to be got by it.)

"Oh, really! Well, half-a-day at a week a pound. I mean half-a-week at a pound a—oh, d—n it! where's a piece of paper and a pencil. Ah, here's a pencil. I'll write it on my

shirt-cuff. Now, a pound divided into sixteenths; sixteen ounces to the pound, ain't it? Well, seven days in the week——” But here poor Trousers became so completely fogged that, in wild despair, he gave the man five shillings, and, consigning the horse to a groom and his calculations to perdition, once more retreated within the house.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, a crunching of gravel beneath horses' hoofs announced an arrival. Travers and Tommy, who had both been reading the *Pink 'Un*, looked up through the window in time to see Jack Dashwood, his horse so tired that it could hardly crawl, ride past towards the stables, accompanied by a good-looking young man on a grey. So unexpected was the sight of the latter, that both gentlemen arose and stared out of the window at the new comer, Trousers saying—

“Oh, really! I wonder who that chap can be?” whilst his friend merely observed, *sotto voce*—

“Well, I'm blowed! What game can Jack be up to now? Caught a mug, perhaps.”

Five minutes later, Mr. Jack Dashwood ushered into the room a fair-moustached, handsome young man who seemed perfectly at his ease, even in that august assembly.

“Allow me to introduce Mr. Ronald Dennison,” said Jack, taking Binkie by the arm, and whispering at the same time, “Don't know who the blazes he is, except that he's a barrister; but he wants to buy the chestnut; a deuced hard-riding man. I was just behind him all through the run to-day,” which is a cool method of praising one's own prowess, by the way.

“Oh, really!” squeaked Binkie. “Oh, you want to buy

the gee-gee? Well, he's for sale, you know. How much'll you give for him, eh?"

Hereupon Mr. Ronald Dennison laughed lightly, and observed that he couldn't be buyer and seller too.

"How much do you want for him, Mr. Binkie?" said he.

"Oh, as much as I can get, you know," and the meaningless blue eye was turned full upon the stranger. "I want a hundred for him, but if you won't give that, why, I'll take less, you know."

"May I just put a leg over him?" asked Mr. Dennison. "Five minutes on him is all I want."

Even that limited period was far more than Mr. Binkie himself wanted of his noble steed. The horse was ordered round, and came, though with many grumblings on the part of the grooms, as they had bedded him down, after 'doing him over' thoroughly. Mr. Dennison was even less than the stipulated five minutes on him. He trotted him sharply down the drive, and then cantered him up the park-land beside it.

"I've seen him jump, and know all about that," he said, as he slipped off the saddle. "The only thing wrong with him that I can see is that he is a bolter. That, of course, takes a lot off his value. But if you would like me to make you an offer, Mr. Binkie, I'll give you fifty guineas for him."

"Oh, really! but then I should lose—at least Pa would lose—such an awful lot, eh? Oh, I think I'd better send him up to Aldridge's."

"All right. I'll go up, if you'll say what day he's to be sold, and bid for him. He's a good horse, I know, but I'm a poor man and couldn't afford to hunt at all unless I gave very little money for my horses. Thanks very much, all the same,



MR. BINKIE JUNIOR.

for letting me get on him. There's my card. I've taken rooms at this place"—indicating the address pencilled on the card—"for the season. If you'll drop me a line, I'll go up and try to buy your horse at the hammer." And after a little more conversation, he walked down to the stables for his own animal, accompanied by Binkie, whilst Jack and Sir Tommy said good-night to the new comer on the door-step, and disappeared into the house again.

Before going a dozen yards they came face to face with Penelope, who had just come in from a ride. Penelope had taken kindly to riding, and made a very different figure at it to her brother. Flushed with the glow of healthy exercise, and in her close-fitting riding habit, cut by the best London tailor, which showed off her well-turned figure to the greatest advantage, Penelope Binkie was the kind of girl to arrest the attention of any properly constituted individual of the male sex, and Mr. Ronald Dennison was by no means proof against such a strong phalanx of physical charms. He politely raised his hat, and was passing on (because he did not see any reasonable excuse for not doing so), when the lady happened—happened, we repeat—to drop her handkerchief on the gravel path. I daresay that many of us have noticed, and particularly in our salad days, what an awkward thing a girl's handkerchief is to hold. It must be as slippery as an eel, and it always seems to elude its owner's grasp just at that awkward psychological moment when the eyes of one of the opposite sex are on it. In this case the handkerchief fell just as Mr. Ronald Dennison got abreast of the fair craft sailing past him. He stooped, picked up the tiny rag of cambric, and gallantly restored it to its fair owner.

"Oh, let me introduce you to my sister," bleated Binkie. "Mr. Donald Tennyson—Miss Binkie," then he added to himself, in rather uncertain tones, "I suppose that's the proper thing to do, but I'm sure I don't know."

Penelope bowed. She had not caught the mispronounced name, but, looking at the young man, tall and erect, with his clear-cut, aristocratic features, as he stood before her, she thought to herself: "Surely this must be a 'somebody'—a man of importance. I wonder if it's Lord Gravity?"

For five whole minutes they stood and talked. Beware, Penelope, beware! Handsome young men in pink, with all that exaltation upon them which comes of having just taken part in a good gallop with hounds, are dangerous to naturally susceptible female hearts.

They chatted gaily on, and then she remembered that Lord Gravity did not hunt. Who, she wondered, was this fascinating stranger? But dusk was closing in, and with a glance somewhat more tender than a five minutes' acquaintance appeared to warrant, the young man again raised his hat and passed on towards the stables.

As he rode out past the house on his way down to the lodge gates, he looked up at the windows and saw, or thought he saw, just the tiniest flutter of a white curtain pushed aside hurriedly, and a pretty face behind the diamond panes, for a brief moment.

Then Mr. Ronald Dennison rode on home to his bachelor lodgings, feeling very well pleased with his day's work.

CHAPTER VII.

AT ALDRIDGE'S—MISS TURNOVER.

THROUGHOUT the whole district hunted by the Duke of Haughtyshire everyone seemed talking only of the coming Hunt Ball—a gay *réunion*, which was to take place at the end of the month, and to which the fair sex in especial were keenly looking forward. I say in especial, because it is to be presumed that the younger members of the masculine gender were also, in their way, anticipating some of its delights. But whether it is that women know they look their best, as men assuredly appear at their worst, when dancing, or from some other cause, certain it is that at the end of this nineteenth century the majority of women ‘gallop generously,’ whilst men begin to jib and look around them for a chance of ‘cutting it,’ at the threat of a dance invitation card. Give a man a dinner and he is quite at home; menace him with a dance and you can’t ‘whip him straight up a passage,’ to use the late Sir Robert Peel’s expression.

Now the Hunt Ball was a very ‘County’ affair in Haughtyshire—not one of those ‘omnium gatherums’ which obtain in some hunts we could all put a name to if we wished. The Duke himself, with an imposing house-party, was always present—unlike many of the high and mighty of the land, who put their names down on lists of patrons, etc.,

and then never think any more about the matter, His Grace of Haughtyshire made it a wholesome rule never to let his name appear as patron of a ball, or theatricals, or Steward of a race meeting, unless he intended to be present in person at the entertainment. Then the County people elected a committee from amongst themselves for inspection purposes, thus keeping out any 'objectionables.' Of course, as the Duke's was a private pack, and there were no subscribers, there could be no question of the *right* of anyone to come in, and this simplified matters amazingly.

Mrs. Binkie had set her heart upon going to the ball, though how to obtain tickets she did not know. Ever since the advent of Mr. Ronald Dennison to The Chase, Miss Binkie also had expressed a strong wish to be present. But they knew nobody, or next to nobody—there was the rub. In her perplexity, Mrs. Binkie turned to the Parson for guidance (not of a spiritual nature), and asked him to dine.

Now, the Rev. Geoffrey Yarboro being of a casual, and, withal, sociable turn of mind, determined to accept the invitation. At all events, these new people were parishioners of his, and it was his duty to see something of them. So he sat down and wrote a polite little note, assuring Mrs. Binkie that it would afford him great pleasure to dine with her and hers, at seven of the clock on the ensuing Thursday evening.

Meantime, the gay Marmion had been sent up to Aldridge's for sale, and on the day on which he was to be 'dispersed,' as Jack Dashwood called it, Trousers, after having vainly requested his two friends to accompany him—it was a near meet, that day, and they had privately agreed beforehand that they

would see Binkie d—d first, if he should ask them—stated his intention of running up to London alone, to see his horse sold. He had received a catalogue overnight from the big horse repository, and, with the assistance of Sir Tommy, had made out pretty closely the time at which the son of Capulet would face the rostrum. Attired in a light drab covert coat, with skirts standing out stiffly all round him, tighter legged trousers than usual, and a brown billycock hat with no rim to speak of, our friend drove down to the station in his very high tandem cart (which had never yet had a tandem in it, by the way)—got into a first-class smoker, and was whirled off to town amidst a pile of sporting papers which he forgot to read.

Arrived at the London terminus, he hailed a hansom and desired the driver to take him to a certain confectioner's shop just out of Holborn. Here he alighted, and, sucking the handle of his Whang-hai cane, entered, and was warmly greeted by the 'daughter of the house,' Miss Tottie Turnover. Mr. Binkie's vacuous smile was even broader than usual, as he extended a large, warm, red paw across the counter and enclosed the lady's—which, by the way, was also of 'useful' dimensions—in it. As Travers continued smiling and silent, the goddess of the cakes opened fire with—

"Well I never, Halgy, this is a surprise! I never expected you 'ere! Why, where've you been, all this time?"

"Oh, I've been down at my place in Haughtyshire, hunting, you know. Do you remember that night I took you to the Gaiety, Tottie? What awful fun we had, hadn't we? I often think of that night, you know. I don't know why I do; but I do, you know. Funny, ain't it?" and the meaningless

blue eye and the vacuous smile came to his aid, just as speech again failed him.

"Well, tell me now, what brought you up here this morning?" said the charmer.

"The train; he, he, he!" grinned Travers Algernon, thinking he'd said something awfully funny and extremely humorous.

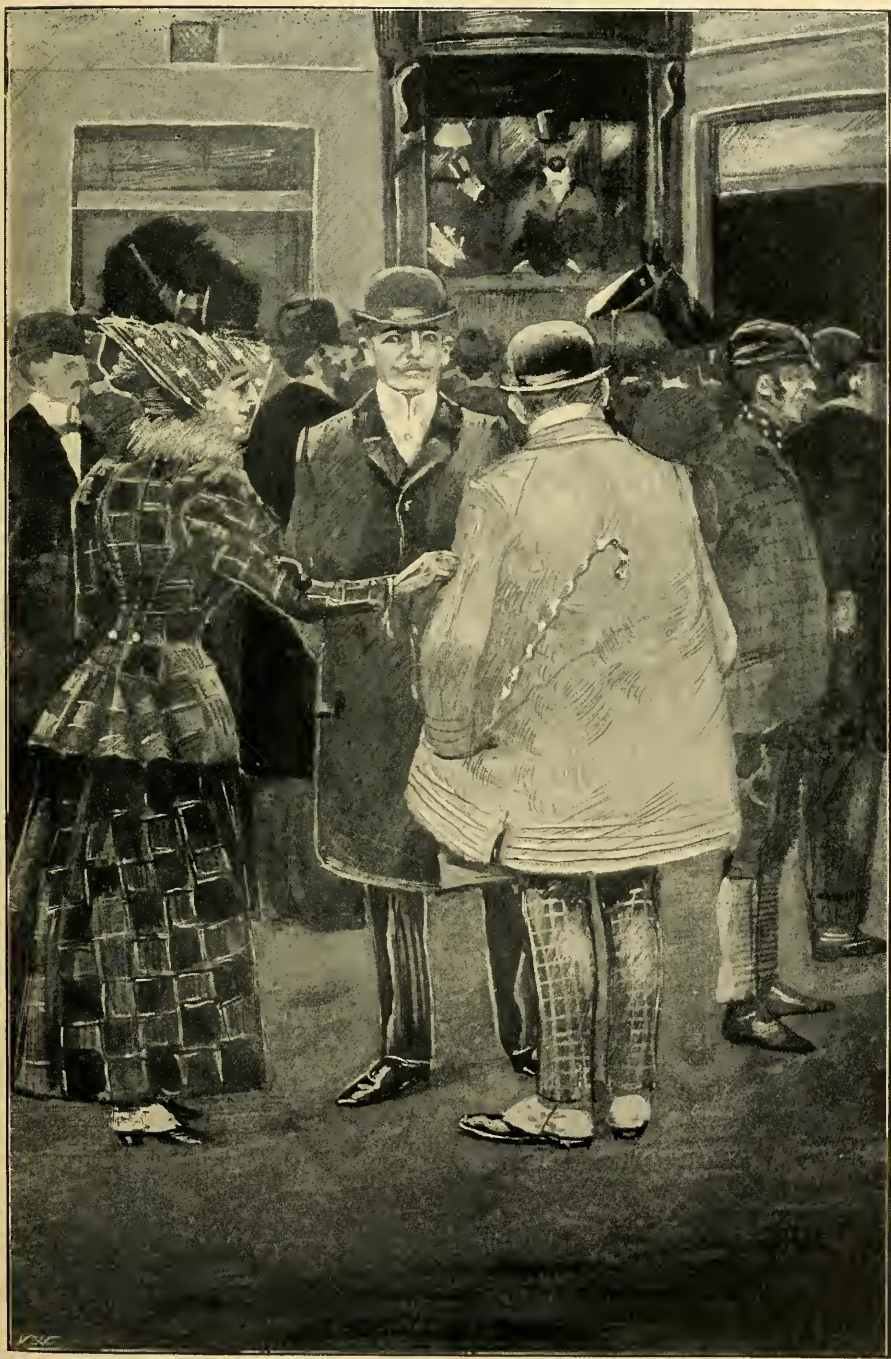
"Oh, g'long, do!" giggled the lady, who, for thirty-two years of age, was commendably playful and hoydenish. "Shall I give you a glass of cherry brandy, now? You will? Ah, I thought so," and she gave a coquettish swing of her skirts as she turned round and perkily took down a bottle from the shelf behind her. She poured out the rubicund fluid into a small glass, from which Travers gently sipped. Miss Turnover rested both elbows on the counter, and her chin in her hands, as she gazed upon her 'Halgy's' manly beauty. Binkie smiled again, more inanely than ever.

"And now tell me what you've come up to town for," she said.

"Oh, I've just run up to see a horse of mine sold," he squeaked, and then added, by way of pleasant banter, "You'd better come with me, Tots!"

"All right, I will!" exclaimed the lady, vivaciously. "'Ow long will you give me to get ready? I should love it—with you, you know, Halgy!" The aspirates always became an uncertain quantity with Miss Turnover at moments of excitement.

Now this was 'a facer' for Travers. He had not had the faintest idea of being taken at his word in such a manner, and he was, to put it mildly, very disconcerted at her reply.



At Aldridge's.

“Oh, really!” he bleated; “but I don’t think they admit ladies, you know, to those sort of places.”

“Oh, I suppose you don’t want me, Mr. Binkie,” she cried in offended tones. “Very well, then; you need never come here again to see me, I can tell you. I’ll never speak to you again, that I won’t!”

But in order to check any further outburst—of which Mr. Binkie was in the profoundest terror—he at once said—

“Oh, it’s all right, Tottie. Come along, and we’ll just drop in and see the horse sold, and then I’ll take you somewhere to lunch, eh?”

This had the desired effect. The lady quickly brightened up, seeing that she had gained her point without actually resorting to tears. Tears were fraught with danger to Miss Turnover’s complexion, and their ravages occupied some considerable time to repair. Blowing Travers a kiss from her rosy finger-tips, she tripped lightly out of the shop, screeching to her mother that she was going out for the day (whereon Binkie gave a slight groan), and that she, Mrs. Turnover, had better call Matilda Hann to mind the shop in her absence.

Ten minutes later she returned, wearing a costume of plaid—the pattern of which it would take at least two people to show off—surmounted by an enormous hat, about four times round to the mile, with nodding, hearse-like plumes. The whole toilette was of such an astonishing description that poor Trousers had to take yet another cherry brandy before he could muster up sufficient courage to open the shop door, and break covert with her in the direction of the waiting cab. They at once drove off towards St. Martin’s Lane, the hat continually bobbing in Trousers’s eye, or hitting him upon

the nose, as they bumped over the inequalities of the road. Travers devoutly hoped that none of his Oxford friends would meet him; still more did he pray that none of them would speak to him—or, worse still, to her—after they had alighted. The Tottie Turnovers of the world are all very well in their place, thought the hapless Binkie; it is when they insist on emerging from their place that they become trying to the nerves of those who are, *pro tem.*, responsible for them.

They arrived at the Horse Mart a few minutes before the redoubtable chestnut was led into that human ring, which always seems to be formed of the same faces. Year in, year out, those same men appear to be there. Do they live on the spot, we wonder, eating and drinking, perhaps, surreptitiously and when we're not looking, and sleeping on that red, red gravel, like hibernating bears, in the intervals between the bi-weekly sale days?

Travers had hardly got his gaudily-plumaged companion up the stairs and into the gallery, which he thought would at least be a less conspicuous place than down amongst the crowd of few buyers and many lookers-on, when the auctioneer's stentorian tones were heard announcing the next lot.

"Lot 44, gentlemen. Chestnut gelding, Marmion by Capulet, good hunter, and exceptionally brilliant fencer. Well known with the Blazeaway Foxhounds and Col. Crumpler's Drag pack——"

"Better known than trusted," murmured a gloomy-looking little man on the outskirts of the crowd.

"——what may I say for Marmion? Anyone put him in at a hundred guineas?"

No response.

“Ninety, eighty, seventy?—come, say what you like, gentlemen, anything to start him. Horse like this must be worth a lot of money, with the hunting season only just begun. What will anyone give for him?”

“Ten guineas,” came from a voice in the crowd.

“Well, sir, I suppose you must be joking, but at all events I’ll take your bid, just to start with. Run him down again.”

“By-y’r-leave!” shouts the white linen-jacketed man at Marmion’s head, and the crowd stands aside rapidly, as a pair of chestnut and white heels swing round and flash in the air for a moment—a scraping and crunching of gravel underfoot, an eager peering of heads—and the horse is again under the rostrum, his head up in the air, his flag well lifted, and a roll in his eye that effectually prevents the school of leg-feelers from pursuing their ordinary avocations.

“Ten guineas only is bid. Ten guin——fifteen, fifteen, fifteen, fifteen guineas only——sixteen, seventeen, eighteen in two places, nineteen, thank you, sir; nineteen guineas only bid. Gentlemen, don’t let a chance like this slip you! A grand made horse like this must be worth three or four times as much as I’m bid for him. And at nineteen guineas——”

“Twenty.” The last bidder is Mr. Ronald Dennison.

“At twenty guineas only. Now, gentlemen,” etc., etc., and the auctioneer tries his hardest to get a little more; whilst a shrewd-looking, hard-bitten old fellow whispers to his neighbour—

“If Ronald Dennison thinks of buying him, I expect he’s a good ’un. Screw loose somewhere, p’raps, but Master Ronny knows a good horse, and I think I’ll go a fiver on to his twenty,

and chance it," and he nodded to the 'man in the box,' who promptly acknowledged the bid by calling out—

"Twenty-one guineas is offered."

"Yes," said the neighbour of the last bidder, "Ronald Dennison knows a good animal, as you say, but don't forget that Ronald Dennison is one of the finest horsemen in England, and has a slender pocket. Ronny would ride the devil—horns, tail and all, if he could get him for a pony!"

"That's true," was the answer, "and I'm d—d if he wouldn't get the old gentleman over a big country all the hunting season, and then probably pick up a good steeple-chase with him in the Spring!"

"At twenty-four guineas only, going—last time at twenty-four——" and down came the little hammer with a slam that made pleasant music in Mr. Dennison's ears, for Marmion by Capulet was his.

Poor Mr. Binkie was not at all pleased. When the auctioneer's last cry of "twenty-four guineas" was heard he plaintively exclaimed—

"Oh, really! but I say, you know, that chap said he'd give me fifty for the horse, and—just wait here a minute" (this to Miss Turnover). "I'm going down to speak to the people inside, you know; I'll be back in a minute," and Travers waddled downstairs, crossed the yard, and went towards the office. Here, just at the entrance, he met Mr. Ronald Dennison, and at once accosted him—

"I say, you know, you said you'd give fifty for the horse, you know; and now you've bought him for twenty-four, you know."

“Yes ; I was lucky,” replied Mr. Dennison, smiling, and holding out his hand.

“But it’s rather beastly, you know, ain’t it ?” said Travers feebly.

“Fortune of war, my dear Mr. Binkie, the fortune of war. After I got up here this morning, I found that two or three men from the Blazeaway country were in the yard, and they knew the horse. It seems he’s been shunted from one country to another, because nobody can hold him, with hounds. So their presence, I daresay, had something to do with the poor price he made. But, although he’s a confirmed bolter, I know him to be a good horse, and at that price one can afford to take risks. I hope your charming sister is quite well ? I’ve been wishing to get an opportunity of calling upon your people at The Chase, and shall hope to do so in a few days.”

Trousers forgot his chagrin about the horse. After all, his ‘Pa’ would be the sufferer, and that didn’t matter. Mrs. Binkie had always dinned into her son’s ear that callers were to be encouraged in every way, so that Binkie at once said—

“Call ? Oh yes, do. Oh, look here, the Parson—forget his name—the Rev. Geoffrey Jawbrother, or some such thing as that——”

“Yarboro,” suggested Mr. Dennison quietly.

“Yes ; well, he’s coming to dinner on Thursday, so the Guvnor’s sure to get up some pop—like pop ? ah, so do I—for the occasion. You just come over and dine with us that night, eh ? I’ll get the proper invitation sent you. Let’s see, I’ve got your address somewhere, haven’t I ?”

Mr. Dennison was about to reply, when the fair Tottie,

having from the balcony espied her 'Halgy' in earnest conversation with a very good-looking young man, determined upon being introduced. So she went downstairs, crossed the yard, touched Binkie's elbow, and speaking to him, whilst she looked hard at his companion, exclaimed—

"What a time you've been ! I got quite tired of waiting, and came down. Introduce me to your friend," and she shook her shoulders at the purchaser of Marmion in her most fascinating style. Travers felt himself rather at a loss. Dennison might make some allusion to the lady when he came to The Chase. But there was no help for it, and he made the introduction with a cumbrous and laboured wink to his male friend as he pronounced the name, "Miss Tottie Turnover."

Then Binkie hurried her out of the yard, and took her off to Scott's to luncheon.

Travers Algernon Binkie arrived beneath the paternal roof-tree that night rather late for dinner. He ate very little, but appeared to be the proud possessor of an important thirst. At intervals he sniggered inanely to himself, *àpropos* of nothing in particular. He informed his family and friends of the fact that Marmion had been sold, but he couldn't recollect how much for.

"Do you know who bought him?" enquired Jack, as he cracked a walnut.

Travers giggled again, as though he had quite lost control of the muscles of his mouth.

"Yesh. *He* bought him. I mean the chap who came (hic) that same day horsh—horse, I mean—chucked Tommy off." (Here Tommy looked ten thousand devils at the

speaker.) "You know who a-mean; Mishter Ronal' Turnover (hie) no, don't mean that." At this juncture, the ladies rose and left for the drawing-room. "Ronal' Tenniscourt. Fine chap, my fren' Ronal' Tenniscourt. Damsight finer chap than——"

"Travers!" ejaculated Mr. Septimus Binkie severely.

"Well, beg par'n, I'm sure, if used langwidge unbecom'n' officer an' a genelman, but my fren' Mishter——"

The door slammed behind Mr. Septimus Binkie as he left the dining-room in high dudgeon. And here let us say, in defence of poor Travers, that his head was a very weak one for withstanding the effects of alcohol. Measured by the capacity of other men, he had not taken very much; but, alas! it was too much for him. Furthermore, let us say that he had really no taste for strong drink when left alone, but he had not been left alone on this occasion, as we know, and a luncheon with Miss Tottie Turnover had tried him pretty high.

Tommy nudged Jack, and Jack winked at Tommy. Then they proceeded to act, and a quarter of an hour later Travers Algernon was safely tucked in between the sheets, and sleeping the sleep of blissful unconsciousness and innocence. At least, I hope I am saying the correct thing in speaking of his sleep as the sleep of innocence. In all the books I have ever read I have found that anybody who slept soundly was sleeping the sleep of innocence; such a thing as indigestion, for example, not being admitted as a possible factor in the undoing of this excellent arrangement of Nature's—or the novelist's, as the case may be.

Next morning it was the old, old story. A thousand hammers were making an anvil of poor Travers's head, and for the five

hundredth time he swore to drink nothing but water for the rest of his natural life. Later in the day he told his fond parents that he had invited Mr. Dennison to dine with them on the Thursday night, when they were expecting Mr. Geoffrey Yarboro, and that he had accepted.

Mrs. Binkie was charmed, and forgave Travers on the spot for his 'little indiscretion' of the day before. Yes, she would send a formal invitation—she called it an 'invite'—over to Mr. Dennison at once. And did Travers know anything about the young man's family? Hadn't he found out who, in fact, Mr. Dennison was? No, Travers hadn't. Ah, that was rather a pity, wasn't it (your true 'exclusive' is always somebody who is shaky on his own pedestal!). Well, it couldn't be helped, and after all it didn't matter, because they were only to have the Parson here. Parsons, in Mrs. Binkie's mind, were synonymous with hungry, poverty-stricken men, whose two great objects in life were begging for their churches and begging for their dinners. The interview she had already had with Mr. Yarboro had, it is true, dealt rather a rough blow at this theory, but still she could not yet get over the fact that Mr. Geoffrey Yarboro was 'only a Parson,' after all.

On the appointed night the Rector, with his close-cropped, iron-grey hair, his jolly face, and young-middle-aged, athletic frame, attired in faultless evening dress, preceded Mr. Ronald Dennison, by a space of only two minutes, into the drawing-room, where he found the Binkie family all trying to stand on the hearthrug at once, as the night was chilly. Mrs. Binkie came forward to welcome him. Miss kept her eye—and a very pretty eye it was, of deep blue with long dark lashes

—fixed upon the door, awaiting the advent of their other expected guest.

“This is very kind of you, Mr. Yarboro, I’m sure, coming to dine with us, just *ong famille*.” (Mrs. Binkie had got hold of this—she wasn’t quite sure whether it was French or German—out of a novel she had been reading.) “We’ve got another gent—— gentleman, I should say, coming, but that’s all. I dessay now you know him? It’s Mr. Ron——”

“Mr. Ronald Dennison,” shouted the footman in vigorous fashion, as he threw open the folding-doors, and the gentleman named, looking bigger, somehow, in evening dress than he did in hunting, or in everyday kit, walked into the room.

He shook hands with his hostess, then with Miss—a slight pressure in the clasp which was almost imperceptible, except to the close observer; a rapid glance, downcast eyes, heightened colour, all presenting a tell-tale picture just for the flash of a moment. We know it, dear reader, don’t we? It is ‘the story that grows not old,’ and yet the one whose first chapter was written in the Garden of Eden.

Dinner was announced, and Mr. Yarboro escorted his hostess, while to the share of the lucky Ronald fell, of course, Miss Penelope Binkie. Before the soup had been removed, these two were on the very best of terms; and such is the forwardness of young man and womankind nowadays, that they were already talking of where they were likely to meet again by the time their attention was demanded through the arrival of the turbot.

Then Miss wanted to know whether Mr. Dennison was going to the Hunt Ball.—Yes, he was, and she?—Well, she didn’t quite know. The fact was, they knew nobody.—Oh, but

that didn't matter a bit ; he, Ronald Dennison, would get her partners.—Ah, but that was not quite what she meant. They didn't exactly know who to apply to, about——

At this juncture the Reverend, having caught part of their conversation, good-naturedly broke in with—

“Oh, certainly, you must come to the Ball, Miss Binkie. Your mother has been telling me there's some difficulty about getting cards, but that can't be allowed to stand in the way for a moment. If you like, Mrs. Binkie, I'll put your name down on the committee's list—and see some of the ladies about it myself,” he added, as he suddenly recollected what would inevitably happen to the said name, if left to stand by itself.

“Now that's what I call down-right friendly, that is,” exclaimed Mrs. Binkie enthusiastically. “Do have some more champagne,” under the impression that she was rewarding his promised good offices by a wholly unusual luxury. “And the Dook, now ; I suppose he'll really be there, will he ?”

“Oh dear, yes. He's as keen on dancing now as he was twenty years ago. He'll certainly be there, and is going to take quite a big house party with him.”

“Well, I'm sure it's really very kind of him, that it is. And to people like you and me, now, which is only what you might call common and ordinary, it seems very condescending, don't it ? But there, you seem to know him almost like his equal, you do. I suppose you see him quite often, now, Mr. Yarboro ?”

“Oh yes. He's my uncle, you see,” said the cleric, helping himself to port before passing the decanter.

Mrs. Binkie could have bitten her tongue out with vexation.

Septimus pulled himself up short, in the act of conveying a piece of preserved ginger to his mouth. Trousers opened his vacuous blue eyes wider than ever.

“Oh! really!” he squeaked, and then incontinently ‘dried up.’

Mrs. Binkie was the first to recover her outward equanimity. Largely mingled with her annoyance at having assumed a patronising air to the ‘scion of a noble house,’ as she afterwards described him, was the delight she felt at having thus entertained an angel unawares. That the nephew of a duke should be seated at her table, his next-door-to-ducal legs beneath her own mahogany—this was glory indeed. ‘Binkie’s Composites’ seemed to be left very far astern now.

“I’m sure, sir—ahem, I sure, Mr.—”(the plain ‘Mr.’ seemed almost sacrilege in her mouth now) “Mr. Yarboro, it’s very kind of you to see about our getting tickets, and—and——” and here she came to a full stop. She wanted to say something to the effect that he, Mr. Yarboro, might rely on their behaving themselves properly at the ball, but was fortunately deterred from so doing by a dim fear that perhaps it would not be quite correct. Not exactly knowing whether to say anything of the kind or not, she took the wise course of signalling to her daughter, and amid the noise of chairs being pushed back and feet shuffling on the parquet flooring, the ladies left their lords and masters in undisturbed possession of the wines and a very choice box of Septimus’s regalia, which he promptly proceeded to push round the table.

“Gave one-and-three apiece for these, ’olesale,” he observed, with a solemn air; “and then I had to take ten boxes.”

“Indeed,” answered the Rector, as he took his third whiff.

"They seem very good ; very good, indeed. By the way," he added, turning to Trousers, sitting open-mouthed and staring straight in front of him, "have you still got that good-looking runaway? I saw you on him, one day last week—or was it you, Sir Thomas," turning to Fitzsquander.

Before the latter could reply, Jack cut in with—

"No ; it's more likely that you saw Fitzsquander *off* him !"

"Shut up," growled Tommy savagely.

Then Travers, striking a match and holding it alight, squeaked out—

"Oh no ; I sold him."

"Yes, and I bought him," chimed in Ronald Dennison. "I think he's a good horse, if you can hold him."

"And sit on him," put in Jack maliciously, "eh, Tommy?"

But Tommy took no notice. It was so extremely vulgar of Jack to make these allusions. The Baronet merely blew clouds of blue smoke from the one-and-threepenny up to the ceiling, and watched them as they wreathed themselves around above his head.

"Well, take care he doesn't run right into the middle of the pack," laughed the Rector. "He frightened Archie Crocker, one day, by sailing with him."

"Oh, I'm by no means looking forward to an easy time, at first," said Dennison ; "but 'beggars can't be choosers,' and if I couldn't pick up cheap horses, I couldn't afford to hunt at all. And if you ride cheap hunters, well, naturally, there's something or other not quite right about them ; if they're sound (and a really sound horse is a bit of a luxury for me to get hold of), why, then they've got a pain in their tempers."

“Yes, that’s true. But somehow, your screws, rips, and wretches manage to get you—or rather, *you* manage to get *them*—over the country all right. Are they really all cheap ones?” said the Rector, bending forward confidentially.

Ronald laughed.

“I haven’t paid a pony for any one of the three I’ve got now,” he said.

“Well, then, you’re a very wonderful man, that’s all I can say. When are you coming out again, Mr. Binkie?”

“Oh, really! I haven’t got a gee-gee, you know. I want to buy one—a nice quiet one, you know.”

“One’s no good to you. Go over to Fobbs, at Cutaway Mount, and I daresay you’ll find two or three that will suit you. Mind you, I am not recommending the more or less excellent Fobbs as a paragon of human perfection in himself: you must keep your eyes open when you are dealing with him. But he’s just the man to find you three or four real good hunters.”

“Is it really necessary, sir, to have so many as that, now?” struck in Septimus. Although an extremely rich man, Septimus Binkie, like a good many others who have made their money themselves, liked to have a voice in the spending of it.

“Well, you certainly couldn’t see much of hounds, in a country like this, with less than half-a-dozen hunters.”

“Gorblessmysoulyoudon’tsayso!” exclaimed the astonished Binkie Senior, in one unpunctuated gasp. And after another quarter of an hour’s smoke, port, and desultory conversation, a move was made, and they left to join the ladies in the drawing-room. On the way there, Travers took the oppor-

tunity of whispering to Dennison, as he plucked him rather nervously by the sleeve—

“I say, you know, you needn’t mention anything about—about that lady, you know—the one I introduced you to at Aldridge’s the other day, you know. She’s—er—well, she’s not—not quite——”

Ronald Dennison smiled at Travers’s hesitancy.

“No,” he said. “She was not quite. I saw that.”

“Oh, really!” squeaked Travers, and then they entered the sanctum of the fairer part of creation, and the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHEZ FOBBS.

MR. EDWARD FOBBS, of Cutaway Mount, was an estimable man (from some points of view), and a horse-dealer by birth. No, reader, I am not making a mistake in saying this. He was, really. That is, his father was a horse-dealer before him, and there wasn't a trick of the trade unknown to Ned Fobbs when he attained the age of fifteen. Fobbs *père* was conducting a very flourishing business at the time his career was temporarily cut short by receiving a seven years' appointment at Portland—something in the stone-quarrying line. He had forgotten his own name, and signed somebody else's to a cheque for a large amount. During this period of retirement, Fobbs *fil*s, playfully known as 'Honest Edward,' because he was the most astounding truth-crusher and the 'smartest' horse-dealer in the country, carried on the business, and did it right well—from the dealer's point of view, *bien entendu*. What his wares, perchance, lacked in form, youth, quality, or what not, was always amply made up for by Edward's soft and honeyed tongue. Report said that this mis-called 'unruly member' had a rough side to it; but if so, none of his customers had ever experienced it. Probably any choice gems of speech which he may have possessed were exclusively reserved for his dependants. 'Honest Edward'

knew horses well, but he knew men even better, and this gift was of invaluable aid to him in his deals. His favourite saying, in the strict privacy of his family, and one which he always strenuously impressed upon his son, whom he was striving to bring up as great a genius as himself, was: "You deal *in* horses, but you deal *with* men."

To this worthy, enter Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie and Mr. Jack Dashwood. Sir Tommy had been suddenly summoned to town, and the summons in question was one before the Judge at Chambers. This alone prevented his being present to look after his own interests, if anything in the nature of a commission were going. As he was physically unable to imitate the example of Sir Boyle Roche's far-famed bird, and be in two places at once, he had, *faute de mieux*, to trust to Jack, "most unwillingly——d—d unwillingly!" as he murmured to himself, when setting out on his unpleasant mission to the great metropolis. "However," he reflected, "at a dealer's there'll probably be nothing to get;" and so he resigned himself to his fate with a comparatively light heart.

As they drove over in the high-wheeled dogcart, Jack said confidentially to his friend—

"Now, everybody knows you're a rich chap, and of course a horse-dealer, above all people, will try to stick on the price. Suppose you let me do the bargaining, Trousers, eh? I shall get whatever you want much cheaper than you will."

And Travers consented gladly, little suspecting that he was thus virtually increasing the price of whatever he bought for the express benefit of Mr. Dashwood and Sir Thomas Fitzsquander.

Mr. Fobbs received them in his smartly gravelled yard, hat

in hand, and conducted them into his little office. He rang the yard bell, ostensibly to summon his head man, but really to give the signal for a general removal of bandages, cold water swabs, crib-biting muzzles, &c. A glass of brown sherry was discussed, whilst Jack explained the business they had come upon. Then the head man appeared, which meant that everything was in readiness, and 'Honest Edward' led the way to Loose-box No. 1.

Just let us pause to ask a question that has long been puzzling us. Why is there a Loose-box No. 1 at all in dealers' stables? No one has ever, we are morally certain, bought a horse since the beginning of the world out of Loose-box No. 1. Probably the horse standing in it is never meant to be sold! It is merely there to act as a foil to the rest, or something to whet our appetite for what is coming. Nevertheless, the stock beast in No. 1 has to be inspected. It is part of the rites.

This particular fraud was a flea-bitten grey with a very 'tucked up' middle piece. He emitted a truly awful sound, half groan, half cough, as Mr. Fobbs opened the door, which would have effectually stalled off any buyer.

"No, I don't think he'd suit you, sir," said the dealer, hastily passing on to the next box. "Good horse, too," he added, in a tone intended to convey the information that none *but* good horses ever found even a temporary abiding place in that high-class establishment.

"Now here's a genuine hunter. A gentleman's horse, that is," exclaimed Mr. Fobbs, quite unconscious of the irony of his statement, if his words were to be taken literally.

The animal under discussion was a big-boned, Roman-nosed brown, with great ragged hips that you could hang your

hat on. He stood well over sixteen hands, and looked like carrying as many stone to hounds.

"Cost me a lot of money, that horse did. I bought him for the Honourable Spanker, at the beginning of the cubbing season, but he—well, he went abroad, and ain't going to hunt this year. The Honourable Spanker he took a wonderful fancy to this horse; said it was just his mark. I daresay you gentlemen know the Honourable? No? heavyish gentleman he is. He said he'd have given me two 'underd for him—if he hadn't just gone into the Bankruptcy Court."

"How old is he?" asked Jack, who had been going through the usual leg feeling process.

"Seven year old, sir." *Nota bene*, that every aged horse anything 'past mark' in a dealer's stable is seven. "Remarkable horse he is," went on Mr. Fobbs, rather hurriedly, as though a little wishful to pass over the subject of the animal's age. "No day too long for him, and jump! well, there!" and the shake of the head that accompanied the last statement made Travers's eyes bulge right out in astonishment.

"Does he ever run away?" ventured that gentleman's piping treble.

"Best o' manners, sir; best o' manners. There, I won't have 'em in my place, if they ain't good-mannered ones. I buy horses to sell to gentlemen," said the dealer, sententiously, "not to horse-breakers; and so they've *got* to be good mannered, that's what I always say. They've *got* to be good mannered."

"Oh, really! and do they know they've got to be good mannered?"

Mr. Fobbs looked at him to see if 'chaff' was meant; but

the vacuous blue eye had no latent mischief in it; it looked simply stately in its solid idiotey.

“You’d like to see the horse out, sir, wouldn’t you? Can see him over the fences—ride him over ’em, if you like. Strip this horse, Palmer,” turning to the head man. “That’ll do. Now go and tell Tom to bring a saddle and bridle. These gentlemen would like to see him over the fences.”

‘Honest Edward’ then led the way out into the yard again, and pressed his customers to have just one glass more of the brown sherry in his office. He thought, by the look of him, that Travers might very likely need a little ‘jumping powder’ before he summoned up courage enough to get on to a strange horse, and ride him over fences. It was necessary also—or at all events, highly desirable—that they should not be present when the Roman-nosed one emerged from the stable, for, truth to tell, he required a little of the ‘warming up’ process before being at his best. He was a good horse, and had been worth a lot of money in his day; but at fourteen (which was his real age) it may be well imagined that he was a bit stiff on first coming out.

As to his fencing capabilities, ‘you couldn’t get him down,’ as the saying goes, and nothing short of an earthquake, or President Kruger’s Indemnity Bill, would suffice to frighten him. The dealer knew he was playing quite a safe card in showing the veteran over fences.

After Tom (whose mission in life it was to ride anything *at* anything, for the modest weekly stipend of 1*l.*) had ridden the old horse over the bushed-up hurdles, the water—supplied by a length of hose into a dug-out ditch, dammed (and pretty freely, too, sometimes) at one end—and a low, white-

painted gate, all put up in the jumping paddock attached to the house, Trousers was invited to get up and "satisfy himself."

Trousers felt quite satisfied to remain on foot, if the truth must be confessed, but inspired by the sherry, and urged unto noble deeds by Jack Dashwood, he determined to mount the 'fiery untamed.'

So the exchange was effected, *i.e.*, Travers Algernon Binkie *vice* Tom, resigned. Mr. Binkie rode away up the paddock, wrestling with the mental problem of whether he should, or should not, attempt one of the 'leps'—the lowest, for choice. But long before he could arrive at any solution of the difficulty, Fate took the matter in hand, as she does so often and in so many unsuspected ways. The veteran hunter, to whom the jumping of fences had grown so much a matter of habit that he merely regarded the affair with a bored air, and as if he wished to get done with what he doubtless considered tomfoolery, as soon as possible, suddenly cocked his ears at the flight of hurdles towards which Travers had unconsciously been riding him, broke into a canter, and before our friend could snatch at his head to stop him, was gently over and blobbing away on the far side.

So easy had been the action that Mr. Binkie had hardly been shifted a bit—for him—a matter which afforded him a profound sense of gratification. Like a wise and prudent man, he resolved not to risk anything further in the saltatory way, and returned at once to where Dashwood and the dealer stood in conference.

"What are you going to take for the horse?" Jack had asked as soon as Travers had ridden out of earshot.



IN FOBBS'S Paddock.

“Well, he’s a genuine horse, that. I couldn’t take less than what the Honourable Spanker was going to give me.”

“——but didn’t!” said Jack sarcastically. The Honourable Spanker yarn was all very well for Binkie, but Jack knew these pretty little fables of the ‘yards.’ He had been there before.

“That’s nothing to do with it,” said ‘Honest Edward.’ “There’s nothing against the horse——”

“Except that he’s as old as a man,” interjected Mr. Dashwood, flipping the end off his cigar.

Mr. Fobbs scanned him narrowly. “I’ll take a ‘underd and eighty for him—not a shillin’ less,” he said, and then watched Jack from the corner of his eye to see the effect of his announcement.

“H’m. And where do I come in?” coolly asked Jack.

“Oh, there’s no margin off *that* price, I do assure ye. There’s no room for any ‘comin’ in.’”

Jack blew a cloud of smoke from his lips, buttoned up his coat, and said—

“Then there’s no buyer, Mr. Fobbs, that’s all. Otherwise I think I should have advised my friend to have him.”

‘Honest Edward’ saw that he was dealing with as clever a gentleman as himself. Binkie was returning, so he said quickly in interrogative tones—

“Shillin’s on the guineas, then?” and Mr. Dashwood nodded his head in token of agreement.

“Ripping good horse this, Trousers; and, by Jove, you rode him over those hurdles deuced well.” Then, as the delighted Binkie got off, sticking out what he thought was his chest, proudly, at the imminent risk of splitting his fancy-

check waistcoat, Jack took him by the lappel of his coat, and in low and confidential tones, said: "You must buy him, old chap. I've been pumping Fobbs, and I think—mind, I only think—I can get him for a hundred and eighty guineas. Of course, he *may* stick out for his price—two hundred. Do you think you would go to two? No? Well then, we'll try for him at one eighty, eh? Or shall we split the difference and go to one ninety? Shall I buy him at the best price I can, eh?"

"I think I'll only say one eighty, you know. Pa said I wasn't to give an awful lot of money, you know."

"All right; leave it to me. I'll settle about the price of this one before we see any more horses," and taking Mr. Fobbs aside, he said—

"My friend is a buyer if I let his head loose. You understand, I'll recommend him to give one hundred and seventy pounds——"

"And look what I should have got from the Honourable Spanker!"

"Damn the Honourable Spanker," replied Jack with easy nonchalance. "I shall bring you his father's cheque. The amount of it is nothing to do with you, except as to your one seventy *pounds*, remember. Is it a whizz?"

The dealer nodded. He was rather annoyed at not having secured Binkie direct, so that all the spoils might have gone into his own pocket; but on the principle that 'Half-a-loaf is better than no bread,' he was fairly satisfied with the deal. A 'mug' of the Binkie order is getting more and more of a *rara avis* in these days of almost universal 'cuteness. Jack knew when he had got hold of a good thing, and he meant to keep it. He rejoined Binkie, and said—

"I've managed to get you the horse, old chap, after an awful tussle with Fobbs. He swore, at first, that Spanker had offered him two hundred and——"

"Oh, really!" squeaked Travers, "and why didn't he take it, then?"

This was rather a 'sticker,' as the questions of children and idiots often are.

"Well, you see, it—it apparently didn't suit Spanker——"

"Oh, really! Then was it a sort of misfit, do you mean?"

"No, no. I mean it didn't suit Spanker to pay 'ready' for it, you see. Spanker was going abroad, or into the Bankruptcy Court, or to blazes, or somewhere or other, it doesn't matter which. But the horse is really worth the money, and I told Fobbs you'd go to one ninety for him. Guineas, I mean," he added, as he saw that Travers's face didn't express so much disapproval as he had expected.

This matter being concluded to the satisfaction of all parties concerned—"of course, subject to his passing the Vet.," said Mr. Dashwood to Mr. Fobbs—they again adjourned to the long low range of stabling, and saw the contents of five more loose boxes and sixteen stalls before coming to anything they thought worth having out. Then a nice-looking grey arrested Mr. Dashwood's attention.

"What's this, Mr. Fobbs?" he asked.

"Well, now, it's funny as you've stopped at this horse, because he's one I meant for you to see in particular. This is a horse by Capulet——"

"Oh, really!" squeaked Binkie, his eyes starting out of his head as he heard the dreaded name of Marmion's sire. "I—

I—don't think I like the look of this horse, Jack. We'll try some other, I think;" and 'Honest Edward,' rather astonished, passed on to a box at the other end of the stable.

"Good-looking young horse this, and as good as he's good-looking, so they tell me. I don't hunt myself, so of course I can't say, but my man he tells me this is a surprisin' horse with hounds."

"Oh, really!" said Travers, dubiously. He had no particular fancy for 'surprisin'' horses; in fact, he entertained the very strongest preference for quiet ones.

"Strip this horse," said the dealer to an attendant satellite, and the clothing was taken off a very good-looking bay, with black points. A well-topped horse, with legs like bars of steel, a grand shoulder with great girth and power visible everywhere, he looked a hunter all over. Jack gazed at him spell-bound with admiration.

"Can we see him out?" he asked.

'Honest Edward' slightly raised his hat and scratched his head, as though not quite prepared with an answer to the query.

"We—ell, you see, now, as to that horse—you see, I'm half afraid of taking him out of the stable to-day. Horse has had a narsetty cold, on him—a real *narsetty* cold, it is—for a fortnight, and he's hardly, as you may say, got rid of it yet. I should be a'most afraid for you to gallop or jump him just yet."

"Touched in the wind," said Jack to himself, as they turned away. "Now here's a neat, cobby-looking, little black. Let's have him out, Mr. Fobbs."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied that worthy, with

alacrity, turning to a gaitered and linen-jacketed groom in order to give the necessary instructions.

Mr. Dashwood mounted this one, and cantered him up first



‘HONEST EDWARD.’

to the hurdles, then to a low bank, and finally to an artificial brush fence, all of which he jumped with a ministerial air, which gave the impression of a finished performer over a country. Travers then got on to the cobby one's back ;

declined the honour of jumping him, professed himself satisfied, and eventually, through Mr. Dashwood's good offices, became his purchaser for what looked like the very low sum of sixty pounds; whereupon 'Honest Edward' chortled secretly, for this particular animal had hung on hand for weeks, being returned as often as he had been sold on Mr. Fobbs's guarantee that he was a good hunter; the fact being, that nothing on earth would induce him to even jump through a gap when out with hounds; he had been taught to get over the made fences in the dealer's paddock, just as a circus horse is taught to fire off guns, and pick up a handkerchief with its teeth. The brute would have gone on jumping these particular obstacles all day long, but never a thing would he look at when really wanted to cross a country. For that purpose, he was about as useful as the average milch cow, and, as he would not go in harness, and was a wretched hack, Fobbs was well out of him—and finally so, this time, as he had taken the precaution of saying nothing about his hunting capacity to either Binkie or Jack. 'Good hunter' warranty means (so says the official definition) 'capable of being hunted,' as well as 'sound wind and eyes;' and as no man born of woman had ever succeeded in getting him out of the first enclosed field in pursuit of hounds, there could hardly be much argument on the subject of whether the horse was a good hunter. Finally it was arranged that Jack should ride or drive across on the morrow morning, with the parental cheque, the horses being, meantime, sent over to The Chase, in charge of one of Mr. Fobbs's men.

On their way homewards, Binkie, a big cigar stuck in the

corner of his mouth, was inclined to talk large, and wax bumptious on the subject of hunting and his hunters. He felt, in truth, somewhat unduly elated, at having been (involuntarily) carried over the hurdles without what naval architects call a 'displacement,' and argued to himself that he must really be something out of the common to have managed so well on a strange horse.

"I think I've bought a couple of damfine hunters, you know, Jack."

"Yes," replied that gallant sportsman. "I think the big'un 'll carry me awfully well—I mean you," he added, hastily.

"And the black's a nailing little horse, ain't he? I tell you what, Jack; you shall ride him, and I'll ride the big'un, the day after to-morrow. Hounds are at Garraways—that's not more than a mile or two beyond the Dog Kennels, is it?"

"Kennels, dear boy; not Dog Kennels, please," mildly put in Jack. "I accept your offer, O Trousers mine! and a-hunting we will go-o-o, a-hunting we will go!" he warbled gaily, as they turned in at the lodge gates.

On the following day, Mr. Jack Dashwood drove over with a cheque signed by Mr. Septimus Binkie, and drawn in favour of Mr. Edward Fobbs; that cheque was duly 'cut up' between the payee and Mr. Dashwood, and the last-named gentleman returned to The Chase. The afternoon was spent in smoking cigars in and about the stables, and in deciphering a missive in the somewhat erratic caligraphy of Sir Thomas Fitzsquander, Baronet, which the second post had brought to Travers Binkie, Esq. It ran as follows—

“ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE,

“BAR WAITING-ROOM.

“MY DEAR TROUSERS,

“I’ve just slipped in here to write you a line about the proceedings to-day; this is the barristers’ room where I am writing, *No Admittance* for anybody else, but I just put on a pre-occupied, hunted-to-death look, and the cove in uniform at the door stepped out of the way, and in I came. Well, my case is adjourned till Thursday, so it ain’t worth while coming down till after it’s over. At to-day’s proceedings one of the things they asked me was a poser.

“‘Why don’t you pay this debt?’ ‘Ask me an easier one.’ I said; and then the judge looked like thunder, and the other side’s Counsel glared, and my Counsel drove his elbow into my ribs, and it was generally impressed on me that that wasn’t the way to answer legal conundrums. When, at last, I escaped from the beastly place, I felt I really must have been guilty of something very much more awful than the non-payment of a long-standing account. I began to wish I could change places with a dynamiter, because, by the aid of a tender-hearted Home Secretary, acting on the information of a doctor, who, to bolster up his colleague, says one thing while he means another, I should be sure to escape the consequences of my acts, however diabolical they were.

“I’m wondering if you’ve bought anything at Fobb (*sic*); if so, I hope it’s a good fenser (*sic*).

“Yours to a chip,

“TOMMY.

“P.S.—If I ain’t in Holloway Gaol by Thursday night, I shall be down with you Friday morning, so send cart to meet the 12 o’clock train, there’s a good chap.”

“Poor Tommy! what a silly fool he is to get into debt,” said the high falsetto. Which is a sentiment largely in vogue with all people who, like Binkie Junior, have more money at command than they know what to do with, and conveniently ignore the fact that others are not always so happily placed as themselves.

As they were sitting on the corn-bin, dangling their legs at their ease, chatting and smoking, another conversation was taking place over the partition of two stalls in front of them, between Jack’s hireling hunter—standing well over at the knees, spare of flesh, and pretty well ‘tucked up’ with hard work—and the new, cobby little black horse. As the colloquy was conducted in *equinese*, it was, of course, unintelligible to our two friends. We will, however, venture on an interpretation.

“You look pretty fat and well, young fellow!” said the hireling, laying his muzzle across the top of the partition. “I’m as lean as a rake, and the hunting season not yet a month old.”

“Yes, but you see I’ve not really been doing any hunting. Fact is, I’m a fraud—don’t jump, you know,” answered the new comer, chewing at a straw.

“Really! But you’ll have to hunt here, you know. I expect you’ll be detailed (no offence to your caudal appendage, my friend, though it is a bit like a shaving brush) for duty next hunting day. I hope you won’t be as hard-worked as I am.”

“Not me. You can put your last feed of Scotch oats, to a handful of dusty Russians, on that!”

“Well, how do you work it? I wish I knew the trick.”

“Oh, it’s easy enough. I go along gaily till we come to the

first fence, where I promptly chuck it. If I've got a good man up, there's a row royal, and I sometimes get a bit knocked about in the rough-and-tumble. If he's a mug—excuse the slang, but I've lived so much in dealers' stables that I can't really help it—I precious soon get rid of him. My great dodge is either to turn round and kick at the fence until my rider gets sick of it, or else rear. Either is effective. Anyhow, they can't get me over any of their ridiculous obstacles."

"But then you can't go after hounds?" objected the veteran. "I suppose you don't care for hunting?"

"No. Blow hunting! Hunting is all very fine for the long-legged idiots whom we have to carry, but not for us poor horses. At least, that's my opinion."

"Well, it isn't mine. You see, I love hunting. I often think that nothing would please me more than to hunt riderless. You'd feel so much more certain of getting over your fences without anybody on your back. As it is, you have to take care of the bigger fool of the two, and think for both."

"I don't suppose I shall remain here long," thoughtfully observed the cobby one. "I'm always returned after the first experience with hounds, you know. It's rather fun," he added, chuckling. "I can beat 'em all. Twice they have had a regular good try with a rough-rider, to get me to follow hounds. But each time it's ended the same way."

"What did you do then?" asked the hireling, with a breathless interest.

"Laid down with the beggar!" was the answer, given with a horse laugh. "That had 'em!"

"Then you've never jumped at all, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose wrong, my friend. I've no objection to

popping over hurdles, etc., in a paddock, when I know there are no hounds about, and I can't be called on for one of those distressing days' hunting, which knock the stuffing out of one for a whole week afterwards. I think it's my willingness at that game which catches the flats; they buy me, fondly imagining that I'm going to hunt. Not me!" and he negligently rested the near hind leg, *vice* the off one, which, throughout the foregoing conversation, had been lazily kept in repose.

"You're pretty 'cute, I see, my young friend," returned the veteran in admiring tones, "but from a sporting point of view, you're no horse."

"From my own point of view, my excellent heirloom, I'm no ass!" was the retort; and then the cobby little black scraped away some of the straw beneath his forelegs preparatory to indulging in a comfortable nap.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HUNT BALL AT MUDBURY.

It was an especially merciful thing that the elements were propitious upon the night of the Hunt Ball. The little town of Mudbury was none too well-lighted, and had the night proved a dark one, many, we fear, would have been the collisions and *contretemps* arising from the vast stream of vehicles, which began, about a quarter past nine o'clock, to first trickle, and then pour, into the open space which lay just in front of the Corn Exchange. The barouche containing Mrs. Pippinchipper and the three Misses Pippinchipper was the actual first to arrive, but the elder lady, quickly guessing at the situation, and holding it to be little less than a crime to take the initiative in such a case, promptly ordered her fat old coachman to "drive on," which he did with a very bad grace, as he had arranged to take a hand at 'all fours' in the bar-parlour of the 'Spotted Dog' early that evening. Two minutes after the Pippinchipper carriage had driven away for a turn up the town, Alderman Muggins (who, as the owner of two useful coverts, in which he strictly preserved foxes, was *persona grata* with the Hunt), Mrs. Alderman Muggins, and one Master Muggins, arrived. With some delay—for the lady was of the ample kind, and the carriage-door not wide—Mrs. Muggins was extracted from the vehicle, and conveyed by her husband and

son up the steps and into the brilliantly-lighted hall. Hardly had the good lady entered the cloak-room and divested herself of her multifarious wraps, than two more of the softer sex were shown in—Mrs. and Miss Holder-Loof—who ‘didn’t know’ Mrs. Muggins, so kept their glances studiously directed the other way, and not all the efforts of the Alderman’s wife sufficed to catch the vacant eye, which saw nothing that it didn’t want to see. After another two minutes, the cloak-room began to fill up, and then the chatter of greetings, directions to the attendants, requests for more light on the mirrors, and an extra supply of pins, here and there, soon became almost deafening. Shoes were changed, mufflers cast aside, fairy eye-lashes disentangled, noses powdered, and then the irregular infantry filed slowly out towards the field of battle, thoroughly prepared for conquest.

The Corn Exchange at Mudbury, as everyone knows, adjoins the ‘Duke of Haughtyshire’s Arms,’ and from that excellent hostelry the refreshments and supper were to be provided. One of the last of the old coaching inns, this, everything was done right well there, from a loin-chop to a gorgeous banquet, and the customer might safely rely upon all being of the best. We ourselves are an angel that this house has often entertained unawares. Waiters were even now constantly running in from the hotel, with relays of rolled bread-and-butter, cakes, coffee, and tea, for the delectation of all who chose to partake of them, and following the waiters, kicking out their legs, arranging buttonholes, or drawing on gloves a size too small for them, came some half-dozen or so young gentlemen of the ‘unattached’ brigade, who had taken up their quarters for the night at the once famous posting-house,

as a convenient *pied à terre*. Close behind these came, also from the hotel, a party of four, three of whom were regular followers of the Haughtyshire Hounds, who had had a little dinner there, before tackling the real business of the evening. The fourth, who had been their guest, was a distinguished foreigner, Monsieur le Baron Stepitoff, of uncertain nationality—some said Russian, others Pole; nobody really knew.

“What is he?” asked Charley Thruster of our friend, the Hon. Archy Crocker, the former owner of Marmion.

“Don’t know exactly. Russian, or Scandinavian, or Pole; something or other from the North.”

“North Pole, perhaps?” queried Charley, as they passed on together into the dance-room, where the musicians were already tuning up.

The next to arrive on the gay scene were the Binkies and their house-party. Penelope was looking her loveliest—and Penelope’s loveliest was very lovely indeed—her wavy hair parted low down upon the forehead, her sweet blue eyes, fringed with their long dark lashes, her slight, willowy figure, set off to perfection by the plain white dress she wore, the very poise of her head, all were as eminently calculated to attract masculine attention as to excite feminine disapproval. Monsieur le Baron at once singled her out, as she entered the room, and straightway appealed to his dinner host for an introduction.

Mrs. Binkie was somewhat astonishingly ‘got up.’ In the brightest of violet satin dresses, slashed with white, nodding feathers on her head, and diamonds affixed to every part of her person where diamonds could possibly be placed, she formed so extraordinary a contrast to Penelope, that it was hard indeed

to grasp the great fact that they were mother and child, and we are inclined to agree that Monsieur le Baron Stepitoff



HERR LAGERBIER.

was more than justified, when on being informed of this, he exclaimed—

“ Pas possible ! a freak of nature !! ”

Nevertheless he obtained his coveted introduction to

Mademoiselle, and as soon as the music commenced he whirled her away into the mazy intricacies of the first dance.

Septimus had been obliged to accompany his wife and family—very greatly against his will—and, as he stood with his Cecilia leaning on his arm, close by the doorway, he seemed just about as comfortable as a freshly-caught eel on a marble slab. Sir Tommy and Jack Dashwood had given Travers the slip, and were walking round and round the room, arm-in-arm, endeavouring to make up their august minds as to which of the girls should be honoured by invitations to dance with them.

But now there is a commotion round the band-stand. Pushing his way through the palms and other evergreens, to a place in the centre of the musicians, comes Herr Gersorsenger Splitzen Lagerbier, the *chef d'Orchestre*, specially engaged with the Pea-Green Teutonic Band (said to be the private band of his All-Serene Highness, the Elector of Sorsedge-Mete ünd Stinkewasser, who was Hereditary-Grand-Trousers-Stretcher to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor).

Presenting the parting of his back hair towards his patrons, Herr Lagerbier grasps his *bâton*, and with a preliminary “p’sst!” which quickly silences all chatter and tuning up on the part of the Pea-Greens, gives the signal, and the string-scrapers and wind-jammers alike let themselves go with a will.

The first dance was only half way through when a clatter outside the main entrance of the Corn Exchange—footmen shouting, waiters running down the stone steps, and the champing of horses’ bits—announced the arrival of the Duke

and his party. Lord Gravity had been all for delaying the dinner at the Castle so that it would have been impossible to get to the Ball until several of the items on the card had been disposed of, but the Duke was inexorable. Even his son and heir could not carry the opposition to more than a certain length, and this was soon reached. His Grace loved dancing much; he loved pretty women even more; and he meant to get as much fun out of the Ball as possible. He therefore fixed the dinner-hour early, and so managed to arrive in time to 'take the floor' just as the music of Herr Splitzen Lagerbier's band heralded the commencement of the second dance on the programme.

With the Duke came, of course, Lord Gravity. He arranged his father's natty button-hole of Parma violets in his scarlet dress-coat, and presented him with a pair of elegant lavender 'kids.' Gravity always deferred entrusting the Duke with his gloves till the last moment, as His Grace had a fatal weakness for mislaying all such 'unconsidered trifles' as these, just as he did handkerchiefs, cigarette cases, and return halves of railway-tickets. Then, merely peeping into the room in which the dancers were whirling round, a confused, and to Gravity's eyes, blurred mass of chiffon and scarlet, black and white *tulle*, he sighed gently for the time he would have to waste—time which might have been so much better employed in reading and gloating over the literary beauties of Virgil or Horace—and then he meekly took a seat next to Mrs. Joggletilt, who was chaperoning the four Miss Merryweathers. Mrs. Joggletilt was a lady sufficiently merciful to her friends to confine herself, strictly, to square dances, now that the inexorable scale warned her that, despite her constant

exertions in the saddle, fourteen stone was the lowest she could walk.

Of the rest of the Castle party, there were the Rev. Geoffry Yarboro, who, although only a 'square' dancer, yet always thoroughly enjoyed the brilliant toilettes, the merry music, and the gay sparkle of a ball; two or three aristocratic mammas, with their equally aristocratic daughters, and half-a-dozen young sprigs of nobility for the latter to dance with. One of the said daughters was just now revolving round the room with the Ducal arm encircling her fairy waist. It was too soon after dinner for His Grace to feel sentimental; still it was dawning on him that this was really a very pretty-looking girl. He would take an opportunity, later on, of sitting out a dance with her, in some pleasant little nook where they would not be interrupted, and——

But alas for human resolve! At that precise moment the Ducal eye fell on the beautiful face of Adela Comely, who had just entered the ball-room, and stood at the door, surrounded by men in the Hunt uniform, bowing and smirking, and trying to outdo each other in paying *fin-de-siècle* compliments, as they solicited the honour of a dance. Adela had far too good an eye for effect to arrive at the very beginning of the evening. She had so timed matters that her entry into the ball-room should not be made in the midst of a crowd of counter-attractions. She wanted the field to herself—just as you and I, my brother scribbler, try to get our books out at the moment when they won't be swamped by the books of other and better writers than ourselves, you know!

Having secured one dance each, the little court, of which Miss Comely was the reigning, and somewhat imperious,

monarch, slowly melted away, just as Ronald Dennison, who had taken a bed at the 'Duke of Haughtyshire's Arms' for the night, came up, programme in hand. Ronald and Adela were old friends—if truth must be told, old lovers. But in this weary, work-a-day world, where Cupid, however active in the prosecution of a suit, absolutely declines the honour of finding the wherewithal to pay the butcher's bill for any married couple, these two looked into each other's eyes, and sighed, and—recognised the impossible. Nevertheless they were the best of friends—they had acknowledged the unfortunate existence of the commercial difficulty—that was all.

"Yes, Ronny, you can have number nine and fourteen. And sixteen, too, unless—unless—well, you know," and Adela's long black lashes dropped again, as he looked at the state of her programme. Ronny nodded.

"Business is business, Ronny, eh?" and the girl laughed softly. "If he wants several dances, I shan't be able to spare you—— Ah, Duke, how are you?"

And after bowing with a pleasant smile to the mercurial nobleman, Ronald Dennison sauntered away, repeating to himself—

"'Business is business,' as sweet Adela says, and I must be looking after mine. I'm not so sure that my own isn't mixed with a good deal of what one might call pleasure, too. They say a man can't be in love with two women at the same time. Don't believe it. I'm in love—or at least I was in love—with Adela, and I'm really feeling very sweet upon that dear little girl, Penelope. What a pity she's got such an awful cad of a father! Never mind that—if he's a cad, she's not a caddess. Old man must have heaps of money; stuffed

with it, I should think. I begin to fancy that my *affaire de cœur* with Adela is on the wane, and I really believe she's getting genuinely fond of Haughtyshire, although she pretends she isn't to me. Well, he's a deuced good fellow, with all his faults, and Adela would make him a model Duchess. But what of poor Gravity? Would he call her 'Mamma,' I wonder!" And the thought so tickled Ronald that he was still laughing when he came face to face with Miss Penelope Binkie.

She had just been returned to the charge of her mother by Monsieur le Baron, with whom she had had a most enjoyable waltz. He had asked her for another, a little later on, and then for a third. He was again making his way through the crowd in her direction—after a very satisfactory interview with his host as to the lady's pecuniary position—when Dennison, with a shrewd guess as to how the land lay, thought it time to cut in on his own behalf. He rapidly put his name down on her programme for some three or four dances, and immediately carried her off to a seat beneath some tall palms, for a quiet chat.

Mr. and Mrs. Binkie still stood together in one corner of the room, feeling somewhat 'out of it.' Mr. Yarboro had been up and chatted a few minutes with them, as had Mr. Ronald Dennison, but now they were left alone again.

Jack Dashwood and Sir Tommy had not thought it at all inconsistent with their duty to their host and hostess to turn their backs on them directly they arrived, and go off on their own affairs. They also, by common consent, shunted Travers, who hardly got a dance during the early portion of the evening. Jack was hunting fruitlessly for heiresses, and Tommy for some chance friend who would lend him a tenner,

Trousers having proved a useless 'draw' during the last week on account of some rather startling demands made upon his privy purse by Miss Tottie Turnover.



PENELOPE.

Jack felt that fate had been especially hard upon him in regard to Penelope Binkie. No one could call him a 'laggard in love,' for within a week of being introduced—which was only a reasonable time for making a few financial enquiries as to her probable prospects—he had proposed to lay at the lady's

dainty feet his hand and heart, and was much chagrined when informed by her that she had absolutely no use for either of them. However, Jack consoled himself by the thought that there were plenty of women wanting husbands, and also with the time-worn aphorism that there are 'as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' In short, that 'the time will come,' as the transpontine drama villain of our young days used to exclaim.

The Duke had just got over the arduous task of conducting the Honourable Mrs. Joggletilt through the intricacies of the Lancers, and returned her to her place. His next dance engagement was with Adela Comely, and he went up and claimed her as soon as he could do so without impropriety.

"Shall we sit out, my dear Miss Comely? My last partner was a leetle——"

"Exhausting," suggested Adela slyly, as she took the Duke's proffered arm, and they walked slowly away towards a convenient corner.

"A trifle so. Perhaps it was my own dancing that was at fault."

"Oh, my dear Duke, how can you say so? But I see you are only fishing for compliments. If so, you are fishing in shallow waters," she laughed.

"Shallow waters!" exclaimed the Duke in mock tragic tones. "How can the word 'shallow' ever be associated with the beauteous Miss Comely?"

"Well, you don't mean to suggest that I am deep, I hope." And although Adela smiled her lightest smile, there was just a tinge of alarm about her voice as she spoke the words.

"My dear Miss Comely, you know—— Well, my dear boy,

what is it?" asked the Duke, suddenly coming to a full stop in his flowery speech to the lady, as Lord Gravity appeared round the corner without warning, and said—

"The Dance Music Committee, father, would like to know——"

"My dear Gravity, pray represent me with the Dance Music, or any other committee. Your judgment in all matters invariably meets with my approval," answered the Duke, with a courteous wave of the hand, and Lord Gravity had, perforce, to retire. He knew that he had probably succeeded in putting his father 'off his stroke' for the time, and that sufficed him. At all events, it was the best thing he could do, under the circumstances.

It took the Duke some few minutes to rearrange his thoughts and prepare another pretty speech, and whilst the fair Adela was gently paving the way for the reception of further compliments, a slight diversion arrested their attention.

A couple had just pulled up to rest, after gyrating several times round the room. They were standing with their backs turned to the Duke and Adela, but the latter quickly saw that they were Ronald Dennison and Penelope Binkie. The music was just ending in a long drawn-out note, specially insisted on by Herr Splitzen Lagerbier, and duly executed (not to say murdered) by the Pea-Greens, when Ronald said—

"So sorry this dance is over, Miss Binkie. It seemed such a short one. May I take you in to supper?" and the lady, well pleased at the idea, was just turning to give a smiling assent, when Monsieur le Baron Stepitoff suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Ah, my dear Mademoiselle Binkie, you will make me the

pleasure to confer upon me the next ; the supper dance, is it not ? ”

“ Afraid you’re too late, Baron. Miss Binkie has promised to go into supper with me,” replied Ronald smilingly.

Now, Monsieur le Baron had not failed to notice Ronald’s marked attention to Penelope throughout the evening, and, as a matter of fact, had overheard the conversation we have just recorded, relative to the supper engagement, and thought it high time to intervene. So, conveniently ignoring Ronald’s remark, he grimaced anew, and said—

“ Mademoiselle will give me the dance ? ”

“ I’m afraid I can’t. I have promised to go into supper with——”

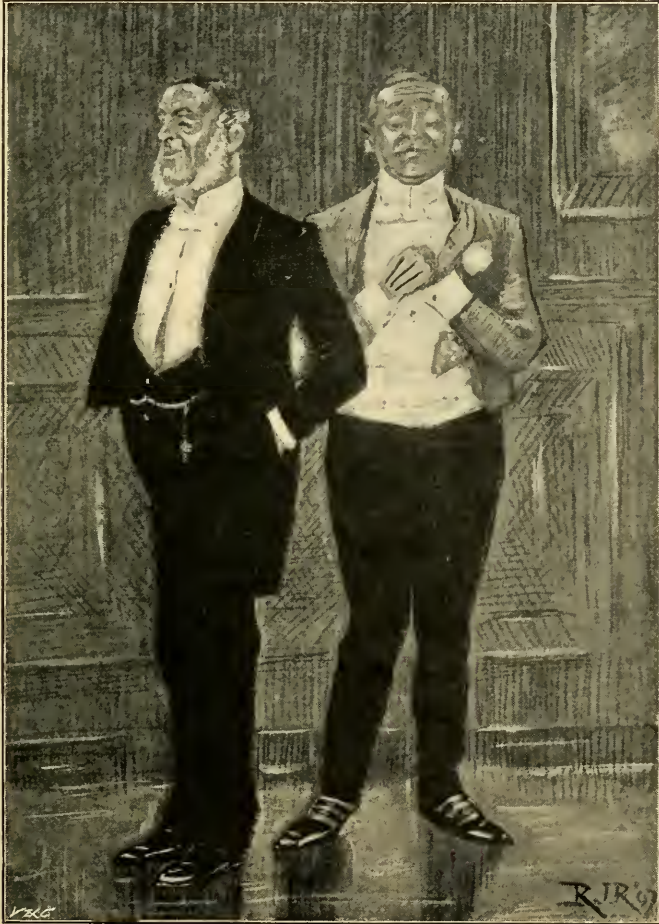
“ Ah, but Monsieur will excuse you. Monsieur *must* excuse you ! ” and the little man excitedly offered his arm to the embarrassed Penelope, who looked from one to another in manifest alarm that there would be an explosion.

“ Not quite so fast, Monsieur le Baron. Miss Binkie is the person to decide.”

“ Sare, wish you to make me the insult ? You do not fright me, sare, I can assure you ; I am not a frightful man,” and the Baron swelled out his chest and looked very fierce indeed.

“ Well, that’s a matter of opinion into which we need not enter now,” replied Ronald drily, alluding to the concluding portion of Stepitoff’s sentence, whilst Penelope was divided equally between a desire to laugh and an inclination to cry. What the trouble might have eventuated in it is impossible to say, but just at this moment the ever tactful Duke interfered by calling to the Baron to come and be introduced to Miss Comely. This ended a somewhat strained situation, and five

minutes later the great majority of the guests were filing into the supper-room. The Duke took his seat at the head



BINKIE AND SON.

of the top table, surrounded by a select party of his own particular friends, and supplied, through the thoughtfulness of his son, with his own particular brand of champagne.

H.H.

K

Then, amid the clashing of plates, the rattling of knives and forks, and the popping of champagne corks, the festive banquet was fairly started.

Supper at the Haughtyshire Hunt Ball was always conducted on somewhat old-fashioned lines. None of your rushing in to gobble down the wing of a chicken and a stale roll, half a glass of champagne, and off again to the dance-room. Not a bit of it. Supper was a very solid, as well as a somewhat formal function here, and the Duke was always expected to propose that time-honoured toast, the ladies. Upon the youngest bachelor present usually devolved the task of replying, but on this particular occasion young Mr. Calflove had so earnestly entreated the Duke to let him off, that His Grace had done so, conditionally on his supplying a sacrificial victim to take his place. Calflove had easily persuaded Stepitoff to do this, and after a few graceful words from the Duke in proposing the toast, a loud clattering of glasses and rapping of knife-handles on the supper-table heralded the rising of the Baron.

Smiling in a very self-satisfied manner on the company, he began—

“Milor Duke, gentle ladies and mens: As a strangere to your shores I ’ave to bless you for ze honour you give me to reply ze toast of ze ladies. Ze ladies of zese countries are amongst ze most beautifullest of zare sex.” (“When zey are amongst French or Russian womens,” he added to himself.) “Ze English ladies have ze best gompexions, ze finest ’air, ze longest feet—ah! pardon!—I should say ze most bewitchin’ manners of ze world! I would zat I could stay in zis noble land for nevermore; but *hèlas!* I



M. le Baron is wrathful.

am recall to my own country, and shall be oblige to—to—vat you call to——”

“Stepitoff, eh ?” suggested Jack Dashwood in an audible whisper.

“——*retournez*, ver’ soon queekly, but I shall always remembare ze honour that I have do to you, zis night, in return ze zanks of ze ladies. I zank you all also for ze ver’ pleasant way you ’ave receive me at zis so filling a supper, and champagnes which must not be drinked too ver’ much, or we shall fall from ze bottom of ze stairs to ze top !” and amid more plaudits and considerable laughter, Monsieur le Baron, who had quite recovered his equanimity, resumed his seat.

Travers had been enjoying himself greatly during the latter part of the evening, with the elder daughter of Sir Toodle Lumpkin. He was not very clear in his own mind as to who had introduced him, but rather thought it was Ronald Dennison. He took the young lady into supper and afterwards obtained an introduction to her mamma and papa. Sir Toodle was an amiable gentleman, who beamed upon the world at large through gold-rimmed spectacles, and was always writing books which nobody read. Lady Lumpkin was a massive and somewhat commanding personage, but her three daughters—all unappropriated blessings—did not take after her. They were not good-looking, and the elder (Travers’s friend) was one of those naturally combative persons who always make a point of differing, either playfully or in earnest, from everything you say, a habit which usually reduces the average man to silence in the first instance, and a lunatic asylum in the second. Binkie, however, found her charming—he didn’t know much of her, you see.

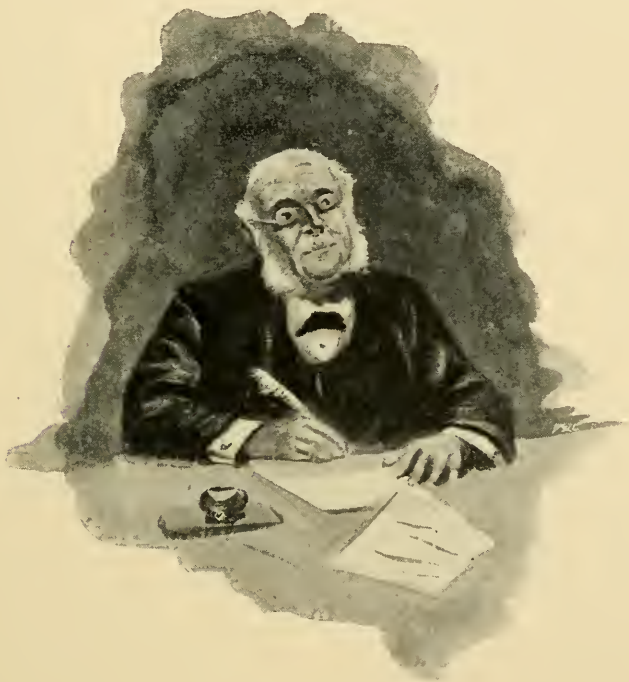
Now Mamma Lumpkin, who was always on the look-out for opportunities of what she called 'placing' her daughters in life, and what uncharitable people usually spoke of as 'man-trapping,' had heard of the new people at The Chase, and even the most superficial of enquiries sufficed to assure her of the fact that Travers, as the only son of the 'Merchant Prince,' must be tremendously rich, now or hereafter. So she laid her plans for an introduction, which she had achieved through Ronald Dennison—a 'detrimental, but a very nice young man for all that,' as she had described him to her girls in private. And having once got the introduction part of the business through, she quickly prepared to follow it up by an invitation to Catchem Court; and to effect this, she communicated her intention to her excellent husband. Sir Toodle was peremptorily instructed to ask Mr. Travers Binkie over to dine and sleep on the following Friday.

Sir Toodle meekly trotted off in quest of our friend, whom he discovered sitting out in a dark corner with his first-born, the (more or less) beauteous Lucretia Lumpkin. The matter was quickly arranged, subject to Travers obtaining his mamma's consent. He went to ask it right away.

Mrs. Binkie, who had been rather dissatisfied with the conduct of her children up to this time of the evening, was charmed. A title! 'Lady' Lumpkin! Certainly Travers must go. She thought that she (Mrs. Binkie) ought to be introduced at once, but not being quite sure on this point, let matters slide for the moment.

"And I hope you'll bring your horse—there'll be plenty of room in the stable," said Sir Toodle. "I—I believe the—er—the turnips and cabbages and things at Catchem are very

good," added he vaguely, with a hazy idea that horses lived on those humble vegetables. He kept a pair of 'light of other days' sort of animals to run in Lady Lumpkin's carriage, but hadn't the remotest idea what they were fed on. Sir Toodle's



SIR TOODLE LUMPKIN.

literary tastes were too strong for his common sense, under every circumstance of life. It was ultimately arranged that Travers should send a horse over, and himself drive to Catchem Court on the following Friday afternoon so as to meet the Duke's hounds on the Saturday morning at Colter's Barn, when the ladies would go over to the meet and see them throw off.

“And mind you come early in the afternoon, or we shan’t see anything of you!” exclaimed Miss Lumpkin to our friend in her most fascinating manner, as Binkie saw them into their carriage. “We shall be *most* disappointed if you don’t arrive by four o’clock.”

“Oh, really!” squeaked Binkie, enraptured. He then shut his fingers into the carriage-door, choked back a naughty word as he disengaged them again, and returned to the ball-room, walking very stiffly from the hips, and with a knowing look in his half-closed eye, which was especially accentuated whenever he caught sight of any of his acquaintances.

Soon after the departure of Sir Toodle and his family, the long-suffering Pea-Green wind-jammers gave evident signs of having had enough of it. Herr Splitzen Lagerbier was ‘slinging the timber’ as vigorously as ever, but his time was more than vague; and we fear that the general performance of the orchestra would not have given satisfaction to His Highness the Elector, could its strains have reached him in far-off Sorsedge-Mete: indeed, from sheer physical exhaustion, they were fast degenerating to the level of those itinerant musicians from the Fatherland, whose efforts in our streets are so eminently calculated for the production of internal suffering in the human race. The Duke was whispering something sweet and soft into the fair Adela’s ear, by way of farewell, when Lord Gravity took his father by the arm and gently, but firmly, conducted him down the steps to the waiting carriage, and the departure of the Ducal party was the signal for a general break up. The Duke’s last words to Adela were—

“To-morrow, then, at the meet, I shall see you?”

And Adela said softly, "Yes."

Ronald Dennison's last words to Penelope were—

"To-morrow, then, I shall see you?"

Penelope said shyly, "Yes."



LUTY LUMPKIN.

Whilst Sir Tommy's last words to Jack, before they got into their fur-lined coats, were—

"Come and have just a splash of whisky and soda."

And Jack replied, "What do *you* think?" And they adjourned hurriedly to the refreshment room together.

CHAPTER X.

A RED-LETTER DAY WITH THE DUKE'S.

THE day following the Hunt Ball, the meet of the Duke's hounds, in mercy to the overnight revellers, was fixed for half-past eleven, instead of eleven, the usual hour. Punctual to the moment, the Duke, looking as fresh as a four-year-old, a bunch of Neapolitan violets in his coat, and his hat set on with an extra jaunty air, cantered up to the tryst. He looked as if he had gone soberly to bed at ten o'clock, instead of having danced till three in the morning. Ronald Dennison was there on Marmion. The horse looked fit and well, and seemed considerably more at his ease in the big ring snaffle his new owner had put on him, than he had ever done under either the Crocker or Binkie *régime*, with a deep ported curb. Adela was not looking quite at her loveliest; the overnight fatigue had taken a good deal out of her, and her cheeks lacked their usual soft colour. But she was beautiful under any circumstances, and the Duke but awaited the departure of Gravity in the mail phaeton—which happy event would take place as soon as hounds moved off—to join his inamorata.

Just as His Grace pulled out his watch for the twentieth time, preliminary to giving the word, our friends, Binkie on the new brown, Sir Tommy on his hireling, and Jack Dashwood riding the cobby little black horse, cast up,

and a move was made for Piper's Wood, a small covert about half-a-mile away.

"I hope you'll have a good time on that horse," squeaked Travers, as Ronald Dennison caught him up.

Ronald had been enjoying a most delightful *tête-à-tête* with Penelope and had only just left her. The lady had hacked over, accompanied by a servant. She was not allowed to hunt, but ever since she had known Dennison, curiously enough, she had never missed riding or driving out to every meet of the hounds.

"Yes. If I can hold him, I expect I shall," was the reply.

"I wouldn't ride the swine for a tenner!" exclaimed Sir Tommy, looking revengefully at the handsome chestnut as he danced along, stepping on air.

"No; because you'd fall off!" giggled the high falsetto; and Tommy rode on hurriedly, not at all pleased to hear Jack's laughter mingling with Binkie's as he went.

The Rev. Geoffry Yarboro reined up beside Travers as hounds were thrown into covert.

"You wished to be presented to the Duke, Mr. Binkie. If you'll come with me now, I'll introduce you."

"Oh, really! Oh, yes! It'll be so jolly to know a Duke, won't it? I know a Baronet—Tommy, you know; but he's an ass, just like me and you, you know, or any other fellow; but a Duke's different, ain't it? And then——" But by this time they had moved up into the vicinity of the noble M. F. H., and Mr. Yarboro said—

"Uncle, this is Mr. Binkie."

His Grace of Haughtyshire fixed the glass in his eye, but it

evidently did not aid his sight sufficiently to enable him to see Mr. Binkie's fat red paw held out to clasp his own.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Pinkie—oh, Binkie, pardon me—very pleased to see you out with the hounds. All my neighbours are equally welcome—in the hunting-field. And now we mustn't talk, for fear of spoiling sport." And even one so obtuse as our fat friend could hardly have mistaken the hint given that the brief interview was at an end.

The Duke, who had noticed Penelope's beauty at the meets, and had really been almost shaken in his allegiance to Adela at sight of it, could hardly believe that she was the sister of such a very commonplace young man. He turned to his nephew and said, as Stepitoff had done on the previous evening of Penelope: "A freak of Nature, Geoffry; a freak of Nature!" and having just caught sight of Gravity driving away past the cross-roads—he was going to inspect the barn roof and kitchen chimney of a complaining tenant—the Duke pressed his horse up alongside that of Miss Comely, and spoke with her in inaudible and apparently amorous whispers.

'Hoic, hoic!' the crack of a whip—then a distant rate, a couple of minutes interval, and a faint whimper comes down on the breeze. This is quickly taken up by several hounds, and gradually swells into that great, glorious burst of music which no chorus of sweet singers has ever equalled yet for thrilling a human heart to its core. Diana! what sins have you to answer for! The blast of the horn, the glad chorus from fifty throats, bring us all irresistibly into your train, and will do so whilst Englishmen are worth their salt! You seldom fail, in your cruelty, to kill or maim your votaries, but it's worth the risk. Yes, it's worth the risk!

Par parenthèse, we may here say that a friend of ours—he is a long-suffering man, and plays the cornet, and on such occasions it is not only he that is long-suffering—was trying to persuade us that hounds' cries were not really musical; but



THE SERIOUS MUSICIAN.

with the greatest humility we must be allowed to differ. We fancy ourselves a trifle on the subject of music—we are rather an authority on it, in fact. We once played tunes on a post-horn with such effect that the death-rate rose in that neighbourhood by leaps and bounds, and the proprietor of the

instrument finally booted us out of the place, and broke the post-horn in his despair. So, you see, we are speaking from the vantage point of the serious musician, when we say deliberately, and with the fear of Handel, Albert Chevalier, Mozart and the composer of 'A monkey on a stick' before our eyes, that hounds' melody is the finest of all music, and we hope our readers will chime in and exclaim, "And so say all of us!"

But to return, as the prudent soldier observed on first sighting the enemy. The chorus was taken up with a vengeance, and the beauties rattled their fox round the covert so hotly, that *nolens volens*, he had to break. This he did in the orthodox way, at the down-wind corner, and within a few yards of where Ben, the second Whip, sat motionless as a statue on his clever-looking old horse. Ben is eager, young in years, though much too old in experience to risk anything by holloaing one moment before the right time. But as soon as that lithe, red-brown form is well away from the friendly shelter of the covert, Ben's view holloa is let go like a pent-up torrent, and before more than half-a-dozen men can come clattering down the nearest ride, hounds are fairly on the line.

"Hold hard, gentlemen, hold hard, please!" cries Will, his red old face glowing with suppressed excitement.

"Will you have the great goodness not to make quite such an ass of yourself?" came in the Duke's honeyed tones. "Thank you, I'm sure you'll pardon me, but your holloaing is really so confusing to hounds," and the abashed little hatter from Mudbury shuts his widely-opened mouth with a snap.

Another outburst of melody and they are away, and hunting him smartly over a small piece of seeds on to the ploughed land beyond. A hand-gate lets all the field through into this,

and then, rather slowly, hounds take the line on, over a small grip, to some old pasture-land where scent quickly improves, and from a trot, or gentle canter, horses now break into a hand gallop. Will is first at the post and rails which separates this meadow from the next. He jumps it, only a length ahead of the Duke, who is followed over by Ronald Dennison, a little to the right.

Marmion, without actually showing temper, is hinting that a somewhat stronger pace would be more to his liking. He chucks his head about, but not nearly so badly as he did in a curb bridle, and his rider's hands are as light as any woman's, although his strength in the saddle is remarkable. The horse jumps, or rather bucks over, the next fence, a thorny hedge, rather awkwardly, landing with that horrible stiff-legged action, which we all know so well and hate so cordially. Ronald pats his shining neck, and declines to take the slightest notice of his ill-humour. 'It takes two to make a quarrel,' and Marmion, after a short time, finding that it is no good 'whipping a top that won't spin,' gives up the attempt. Hounds are travelling a bit faster now, and the horse has one eye on their doings, whilst the other is fixed upon the rail and newly cut out ditch beyond, which they are just approaching. Ronald, after seeing hounds well out of the way of this obstacle, somewhat releases the pressure on the chestnut's mouth, and gets him to stride along comfortably. Then, without any fuss, he takes him confidentially by the head, and sends him at it in earnest. It is a biggish place, but Marmion romps at it; one powerful hoist of his great hind-quarters and he is over, clearing the ditch on the far side with plenty to spare. The better

mounted and bolder spirits follow their leader over, but many of the field prefer galloping off some distance to the left, where a gate stands invitingly open. Adela would have loved to try the rails, but prudential considerations in the shape of possible casualties to that pretty face which was veritably her fortune, counselled her to give the preference to the gate. She was followed by Mrs. Joggletilt, Lady Lucy, and a whole crowd of men and women. Sir Tommy almost cannoned the Duke as they took off side by side at the obstacle, but no harm resulted, though the noble Master took good care to give him a wide berth for the rest of the run. Ben and Tom Tribe had done their duty in bringing up the tail hounds and stragglers, and were just now settling down to the enjoyment of the gallop on their own account. The Reverend had taken a line on the left and was vastly amusing himself amongst the neatly-trimmed fences which merely served to enhance the excitement of getting across country.

“Forrard ! forrard !” screamed Will, as he ranged up alongside the pack. For once in a way, Reynard had set himself to travel in the right direction, and had got his head for Mountford Earths, a point some seven miles, as the crow flies, from where he was found, and over the very cream of the Duke’s country. The pace grew stronger and stronger as they crossed the turnpike road, jumping a bank, with a low brush fence on top, into it, and some rails out again, on the far side. Here they caught a glimpse of some of the ‘wheel’ contingent, who had driven hither as hard as they could, on the off-chance that this would be the fox’s line. Ronald still held pride of place, his horse going along well within himself, at the sterns, but rather to the right of the now flying pack.





Jumping into the Turnpike Road.

Will, Mr. Yarboro, the two Whips, and the Duke were nearest to hounds of the rest. They had been running now for five-and-twenty minutes without the semblance of a check. Less than fifty yards behind the leaders came about half-a-dozen more, headed by Sir Tommy—amongst them Adela and Lady Lucy. Mrs. Joggletilt's horse had held out signals of distress as they crossed a holding piece of plough; Commander Clump was down, whilst several others, finding the pace a bit too hot for them, had pulled up in despair, or taken to the lanes and roads, hoping against hope for a favourable 'nick.'

"This is glorious," exclaimed the Duke to his nephew; "it makes one young again!"

"Oh, you are always young, Uncle!" answered the Parson, laughing. "But we certainly have had a grand gallop, even if it ended here."

"Dennison's horse seems to be carrying him well to-day. A new one, I understand?"

"Yes. One of Ronny's cheap purchases. He always manages to fight them along, though, somehow."

"Ah, yes. A wonderful man on a horse, I think him. Will you have this place first, Geoffry, or shall I?" cried the Duke, as they went down to a biggish, hairy-looking fence, with apparently only one jumpable place in it for a hundred yards on either side.

"You go on!" was the answer. And the Duke, taking his horse firmly by the head, drove him at the place. He got over safely, though with not much to spare, whilst the Reverend's horse dropped a hind leg in the grip beyond, as he landed. The pace, for the last two miles, had been severe, and

over a stiff country, so it was hardly to be wondered at that horses were beginning to chance their fences a little now. "Forrard! forrard! forrard!" still screamed the Huntsman, although hounds were going a cracker, and must have been pressing their fox hard for some time past. The faster they went, the better Marmion seemed to like it, and finding himself with an undisputed lead, the horse was amiability itself; a child could have ridden him at this juncture, and Ronald hugged himself, metaphorically speaking, upon his good luck. One doesn't succeed, every day of one's life, in effecting such an exchange as a 'pony' for a horse!

The cheap hunter is a very uncertain quantity. Those whose purse-strings are long, have not, happily for themselves, to bother about it, or take the chances, risks and annoyance of the doubtful conveyance. But, nevertheless, there is a lot of fun in store for the poor man—a bit too much fun, occasionally!—in getting hold of cheap ones. The writer having been born *minus* that fortune which does, all philosophers to the contrary notwithstanding, smooth the way of life and extract many of the thorns from this weary path of ours, has had, throughout a virtuous though chequered career, to choose between cheap hunters and no hunters at all; and he still thinks that he has contrived to see as much of the sport as a good many more fortunate men.

The chase now leads across some meadows, wherein are several clean, good fences. After travelling smartly over this delectable ground for some few minutes, hounds suddenly throw up their heads, and the proceedings come to a full stop. Some sheep have foiled the scent, and the check is by no means an unwelcome one.

But to-day Will means to kill his fox, if he can. He jags and shakes up his sweat-covered, foam-flecked horse into a canter again—how is it that Huntsmen's horses, however 'done,' can always raise a gallop or struggle over a fence, at a pinch?—and gets his hounds together in a moment. Ben and Tom are quickly at hand to give him assistance, and he makes a forward cast.

This pause in the proceedings enables Mr. Sanders to arrive on the scene with the Duke's second horse, and five minutes later, the Huntsman also receives his 'relief' animal. Sir Tommy then heaves in sight, followed at a considerable interval by Adela Comely and five or six men. The latter is in a ditch, about a mile back, with Nobbs, the horse-breaker, on top of him. A few of the road contingent are rapidly approaching up a lane to the left, and the rest—where are they? and echo, adopting its customary, though somewhat inane course, answers 'where?'

Whilst horses are blowing and heaving, their legs stretched straight out, their tails quivering, and the sweat pouring off their mud-stained limbs and smoking bodies, we will return to Mr. Travers Binkie and Mr. Jack Dashwood.

Adopting his usual plan, Mr. Binkie had kept well in the background, and showed none of that nasty, selfish, forward conduct, that you, reader, are always guilty of, in trying to get a good start when hounds find. Travers's style of getting across country at least ensured him against the risk of being jumped on by anyone behind—simply because he occupied the position of absolute last *in propria personâ*. Turning his toes well out, so as to catch tighter hold of the horse with his calves—which were so obviously too fat for the purpose—he

galloped valiantly along, at a respectful distance behind the last of the stragglers.

Jack had, meanwhile, gone swinging across the meadow on the cobby little horse bought from Fobbs, until coming to the first obstacle, the post and rails. These he charged, in full expectation that the horse would jump them all right, but whatever Jack may have meant, his horse did not happen to think the same way, and a short, sharp tussle ensued, until the black, pursuing his usual tactics, turned his back to the fence and deliberately commenced to kick at it.

"Oh, d—n it, this'll never do! I shall lose hounds altogether, if I waste any more time here!" and he rammed his spurs in—thereby producing another violent hoist of the hind-quarters—and galloped off, up to the gate, through which the main body of the field were now filing. Here he encountered Binkie, and they passed into the next field together.

"You didn't get over those rails, then?" squeaked Binkie, with a spice of ill-nature.

"You didn't even try," retorted Jack savagely, and away he went, elbows and legs, across the next field, glared at of all, as he hustled past them to catch up to hounds. Availing himself of Ronald Dennison's lead, he rammed the little black horse at the weakest part he could see in a thorn fence, only to be met with still another refusal. Jack instantly turned his head, and shoved him at it again, before the rest of the field, with their: 'Now, sir, my turn, I think;' 'Oh, please pull out of the way!' 'Do let someone else have a chance!' etc., etc., etc., could come up. Again the brute galloped up to it, and again did he refuse and swerve sharply out to the left. Then, Mrs.

Joggletilt arriving, Jack had perforce to pull out of the way, and let her, Adela, and practically the whole of the main body of the field, get over, before the road was cleared for him again. Just as he was gathering the thong of his crop into his right hand, preparatory to giving the black 'what for' if he again refused, Travers Algernon, on his (late Mr. Fobbs's) alleged seven-year-old, came blobbing along.

Squeaking to Jack to "get out of the way," and with his shoulders hunched up into his ears, he took his horse—or we should say his horse took him—up to the fence, and got over, without *more* than a foot of space showing between the rider and his saddle. Turning round, he grinned inanely over his shoulder, and called out to his friend—

"Oh, come on! it's nothing of a jump. You needn't be afraid," and then rode on after the fast retreating field, leaving Mr. Dashwood speechless with rage.

To be planted with a determined refuser when hounds are running is bad enough, in all conscience, but to have it suggested by a sportsman of Mr. Binkie's calibre that it is you, and not the horse, that is 'afraid,' is certainly calculated to try one's powers of restraint pretty highly. What Jack said for the ensuing ten minutes it is not for us to chronicle. We will merely mention that his language was so strong that you could have leaned up against it, and we think that the Recording Angel must have been really 'sat down on and ridden' to keep his place.

"Gr-r-r-r along, you brute!" cried Jack, as he drove the black resolutely, with hand, heels, and finally a healthy whack from his cane crop behind his saddle, at the very mild place he wanted him to jump. Another determined refusal

—more spurs—and finally, by way of closing the proceedings, a dangerous rear, which warned Jack that any further coercion might be attended with evil results. The brute went up so straight on end that it became a mere chance as to whether he would come down on his back or not; and Jack, like the good horseman he had proved himself to be, was not fool enough to court such a risk for the sake of a temporary triumph. So, once more, he turned away from the fence, and galloped all round the field, seeking an outlet, but with the exception of the way he came in there was none, and in a most disgusted mood he drew one of Binkie Senior's one-and-threepenny's from his cigar-case, lighted it, and started on the return journey to The Chase.

'*Revenons à nos moutons*'—literally, as well as figuratively—the sheep scurried away as hounds came up, but scent had been so foiled that Will's first cast was an unsuccessful one. Not a hound spoke to the line, and though the check was welcome, in a sense, the pleasure of getting a 'blow' was largely discounted through the fear that they had said farewell to their fox. However, after a delay of several minutes, Will managed, in what Mr. Jorrocks would have called an 'all round my 'at' cast, to hit it off again, and once more they were moving.

Very slowly, though. Scent had got cold, and the wind, then blowing in great gusts, had not improved matters. Still, hounds kept steadily on, puzzling out the line in the most persevering manner. They hunted him down to the brook, flowing sluggishly along at the foot of a big grass hill, which led on to the open Downs. This brook the field had to jump, but it was not very formidable, and all of those still with hounds,



The Climb on to the Downs,

except two who refused, got safely over. Scent then improved, and the pace quickened up correspondingly. The line now led up the side of the steep Down, and although a few groans were uttered when this was seen to be the case, there was no help for it, and 'grinning and hugging' they all commenced the clamber.

And with tired horses—for with the exception of the Duke and the Huntsman, not one of those up at the check had been able to secure a second horse—it was a terrible climb indeed. Slipping one step back for every two forward, they painfully laboured up the incline. Hounds were already out of sight, and Will was now on the brow of the hill and commencing to gallop again. A few gave up, but found it harder work to get down the hill than it had been to ascend it. The rest persevered doggedly on, and at length reached the table-land on the summit. Three miles of sound galloping ground then lay stretched out before them, a fitting reward for the long, wearisome climb. Hounds could just be seen racing along in the distance, with Will's scarlet coat bobbing up and down, close in their wake; whilst another, that of Ronald Dennison, was visible a little to the right of the pack. In the middle distance were the two Whips and another man; then came the Duke and Adela, now riding together; after them, the main body, reduced to less than half-a-dozen by this time.

For a quarter of an hour longer, hounds ran hard. One by one of the field dropped out of the pursuit, horses or riders, and in some cases both, being done to a turn. Tails were shaking all round, 'bellows to mend' with some, leg-weariness with all.

It *was* a run! Men talked of it for many a day afterwards as one of the best things they had ever known in the Haughtyshire country. And now the quarry began to descend the side of the Down again. What a stout fox he had proved himself! But even vulpine nature has its limits, and Will hoped and believed that his fox must be sinking at last. Horses undoubtedly were, and hounds were certainly stringing a bit. The whole cavalcade kept on top of the ridge, hoping Reynard would change his mind and come up again; all, that is, except Will, who, glorying in his fresh horse, slipped and slithered down the steep slope after the pack. Pushing his way through the scattered furze bushes which grew on the hillside, he cheered the tired hounds on, with his "Forrard! forrard!" the sound of his voice now coming but faintly up to the devoted few still riding along on the ridge of the high Down, their toylike forms boldly silhouetted against the sky-line from Will's point of view below.

At last, however, it becomes apparent, first, that the fox has more in him than his pursuers thought—indeed, Will has a horrible suspicion that they may have changed foxes somewhere since leaving the hilltop; he is certain they were on the beaten one until they got down into the bottoms—and secondly, that the quarry has no present intention of leaving the low ground to rise the hill again.

Ronald has already put Marmion's head towards the vale. The Duke and Adela are hesitating, uncertain whether to follow him, or give up, for although His Grace has a comparatively fresh horse, Miss Comely's bay can hardly gallop a yard farther, and the Duke is much too gallant a gentleman to leave her side at this stage; the Whips are

already half-way down the slope, whilst of the 'tail' of the field there is absolutely nothing in sight. The Reverend Geoffry had persevered as long as any of the rest, but at last his good weight-carrier had hit his leg hard, and gone lame. His defeat acted as a kind of signal to the others to resign the chase, and they all began slowly retracing their steps, not one member of the little party being less than fifteen miles from his stable door.

And thus it was that besides the Huntsman and Whips, Ronald Dennison found that he alone composed 'the field.' The pace was still fairly brisk, but nothing like what it had been earlier in the gallop. They were now in the vale again, and the obstacles began to get much too frequent for the taste of tired horses. Rare 'sticker' as he was, the gallant Marmion began chancing his fences in a way, calculated from his rider's point of view, to make 'each individual hair stand up on end, like quills upon the fretful,' etc., etc.

At length a low stile proved one too many for the good horse; he tried to run through it, with the inevitable result. Ronald, luckily, fell clear of him, and the horse rose to his feet unhurt, but wild-eyed and staring. Dennison patted his neck reassuringly—Ronald and his queer assortment of horses always got curiously fond of one another—and said to himself—

“‘Outed,’ this time, and no mistake! Well, we’ve had a rare good run, and it would be cruelty to ask the poor beggar to go any farther—they *must* kill directly. By Jove, I’ll just hitch his reins to this bit of timber and try a trot over the next field on my own flat feet—hullo! Tom’s down!” and he started off running, as hard as his stiffened limbs would

permit, with the twofold object of offering a hand, if wanted, to Tom Tribe, and of trying to see something of the finish of the run himself.

The Whip, however, was 'right-side-up' by the time that Ronald, panting somewhat from the unaccustomed pedestrian exercise, got to him. Tom clambered again into his mud-stained saddle, but the horse was so done, that he absolutely refused to go out of a shambling trot. Ronald actually travelled faster on foot.

Two fields more, and then with a wild 'Whoo—hoop!' Will is off his horse, and busy amongst the pack. Hounds are rolling over each other, snapping and snarling at that poor little bedraggled bit of reddish fur in the middle of them, which is all that now remains of one of the gamest foxes that ever stood for nearly three hours before so good a pack. Ronald is overjoyed that he is just in time to see them break him up. Will had got his brush, which he presented to Ronald. Ronald had a little gold token in his pocket, which he presented to Will.

"One of the best, sir," exclaimed Will enthusiastically. The remark might have applied either to the fox or the coin. We think he meant the former.

Every one of the four human faces there glowed with delight. It was a red-letter day, indeed. Being over twenty miles from the Kennels was certainly 'against it,' and the pleasure of that ride would hardly be enhanced by the steady, drizzling rain now beginning to fall; but these are common incidents in the glorious chase of the fox, and the quartett with whom we are now dealing were pretty well accustomed to such luxuries. Wherefore, with coat-collars turned up,



WILL.

and caps tilted over their noses, they set about commencing the homeward journey without any unnecessary delay.

“I’d never have forgiven myself if we hadn’t killed him,” said Will, bringing his fist down on his thigh with a bang. “I shouldn’t have got a wink o’ sleep all night!”

Ronald walked slowly back and recovered possession of Marmion, only to find that his saddle looked like a large puddle on the horse’s back. He wiped the worst of the wet off with his handkerchief, and climbed up. It was not a pleasant seat, under the circumstances, but it was the only one available for that dreary ride home. Dennison was afterwards heard to declare that it was the longest twenty miles he had ever ridden—as to there being but 1,760 yards to each of those miles, he said that he utterly declined to believe anything of the sort. Certain it is that he indulged in several brief naps on the journey back; that dinner possessed but a feeble interest for him; and that on getting into a warm bath he incontinently went off to sleep and very nearly got drowned for his pains; and when, early in the evening, he went to bed, he slumbered as soon as his head touched the pillow, leaving the candle to gutter out, at its own sweet will, in the small hours of the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER THE RUN.

THAT grand run was eventful in more ways than one. About half-way through it, our friend Travers, finding himself left in sole possession of the ploughed field he was then gently blobbing over (under the full impression that his horse was galloping his hardest) thought the time had arrived when he could venture to pull up, and get out of any more of the day's business with safety to himself, and a certain amount of glory to his reputation. The new purchase from Cutaway Mount had certainly proved himself a very safe conveyance, and, as Binkie had asked him to do no more than canter along and scramble over gaps, with here and there a small place which *had* to be jumped, his rider had contrived to go through the day pretty comfortably. Having then definitely given up the chase, he managed to find a path which led him on to the main turnpike, and an opportune sign-post at the cross-roads a little farther on told him that by following his nose for a little over eight miles he would arrive safely at the paternal mansion.

Before he had got half-way through the journey he was overtaken by Sir Tommy. That gentleman's hat looked like a concertina, the back and one arm of his coat were plastered with reddish clay, whilst his once white breeches were now

piebald. Scratches freely adorned his physiognomy, and his nose looked about twice its natural size.

“Yes,” said he, in answer to Binkie’s lifted eyebrows and vacuous smile: “Come a buster again. Just my luck, ain’t it? And yet you hear people say you’re always so dull in the country. Dull! What do *you* think? The early post brought me four unpaid bills, a judgment summons, and a notice in bankruptcy. I get snubbed by that girl I’m so ‘gone’ on—Miss Comely, you know—at the meet, and then when we are in for the fastest thing of the season, this silly brute of a horse goes and tumbles, bustle over hairpins, at a thorn fence. Dull, indeed! Dull be d—d!” wound up Tommy with considerable warmth.

“Oh, really! Well, *I* didn’t fall off, you know.”

“Who the —— said anything about falling off, you silly cuckoo!” burst out Tommy so furiously that Travers positively shook in his top-boots, and wished devoutly that he hadn’t spoken. “Can’t you understand the difference between falling off and your horse falling with you, you blithering idiot?”

“Oh, real——” began Binkie.

“Oh, shut your head,” retorted Tommy savagely, jobbing his horse unconsciously with the spur, and moving about half a length ahead of his companion. It was not often that the Baronet lost his temper with Binkie, exasperating as some of the latter’s sayings were. Such luxuries as a ‘let-out’ at his host could only be safely indulged in when Tommy was not in want of a fiver, and such occasions were indeed rare with him, as we know.

As they rode in silence up the carriage-drive of The

Chase, they fell in with Jack Dashwood, who had returned on the worthless brute he had ridden, reassumed his tweed suit, and was now, full of fury and Bass's ale, puffing savagely at one of Travers's cigars, and doing 'sentry-go' up and down the path outside the hall door. He would 'make that devil of a horse go over a fence, or know the reason why.' He would 'cut him into ribbons,' but what he'd make him go. He'd kill the brute. He'd—he'd—he'd—— "Hullo! you chaps are back pretty early," and he broke off his reflections upon the iniquities of the cobby little black horse, as his two friends ranged up alongside him. And then each explained to the others how this was and how that was, and finally the trio adjourned to Travers's own little room, and drowned their annoyance with each other and the world at large in what Ouida calls 'frothing, foaming, amber liquid,' but which in our prosaic way we generally speak of as a whisky and soda.

Even such gay and enthusiastic worshippers at Cupid's shrine as the Duke of Haughtyshire require a certain amount of suitable environment in order to carry on their love-making, and it must be confessed that the bleak hilltop on which we left His Grace, with darkness falling rapidly over the land, and a cold, driving rain, to say nothing of the now freshening wind, hardly supplied a fitting frame for the picture so constantly in the Ducal mind of the respective loves of Venus and Adonis, Chloe and Strephon, in which he himself naturally always played the male title *rôle*.

"I don't know—I really can't think, where we are," exclaimed Adela, somewhat in dismay, as she gazed helplessly round on the bare, undulating down-land. She was conscious

that the rain was rapidly taking all the curl out of her hair, damping her cravat, and, in short, that she was by no means looking at her best. The Duke, too, did not seem so pleased at being left alone with her in this desolate spot as she would have liked to see. Altogether, her chance of reigning at the Castle went back considerably in the betting just at this period.

Although miserable and shivering, the Duke was as urbane and courteous as ever. Had he been ordered out for execution, his antecedent politeness to the hangman would have been of the most natural and easy description.

“In broad daylight we should have been able to see the top of the Castle from this point ; but I am a little uncertain which way we ought to go now so as to strike the main road,” he said, as he turned up his coat-collar, and drew off the leather gloves he had worn all day, replacing them with the white worsteds which had been carefully tucked into his saddle-girths by Gravity. “I wish I could get you some refreshment, my dear Miss Comely ; perhaps we can obtain a cup of tea for you at an Inn, before we have got very far upon the road home.”

Miss Comely, with the sweetest smile she could muster under the circumstances, which, it must be confessed, were somewhat depressing, said she didn't care for any tea (feeling all the time that she would cheerfully exchange her most precious possession for a cup), but that it was very good of the Duke to think of it, all the same, etc., etc. And then they turned their horses' heads to the blast, and began to descend the greasy chalk-path, slipping and sliding, on their weary ride home.

That night, the unusual sound of a bell, about nine o'clock,

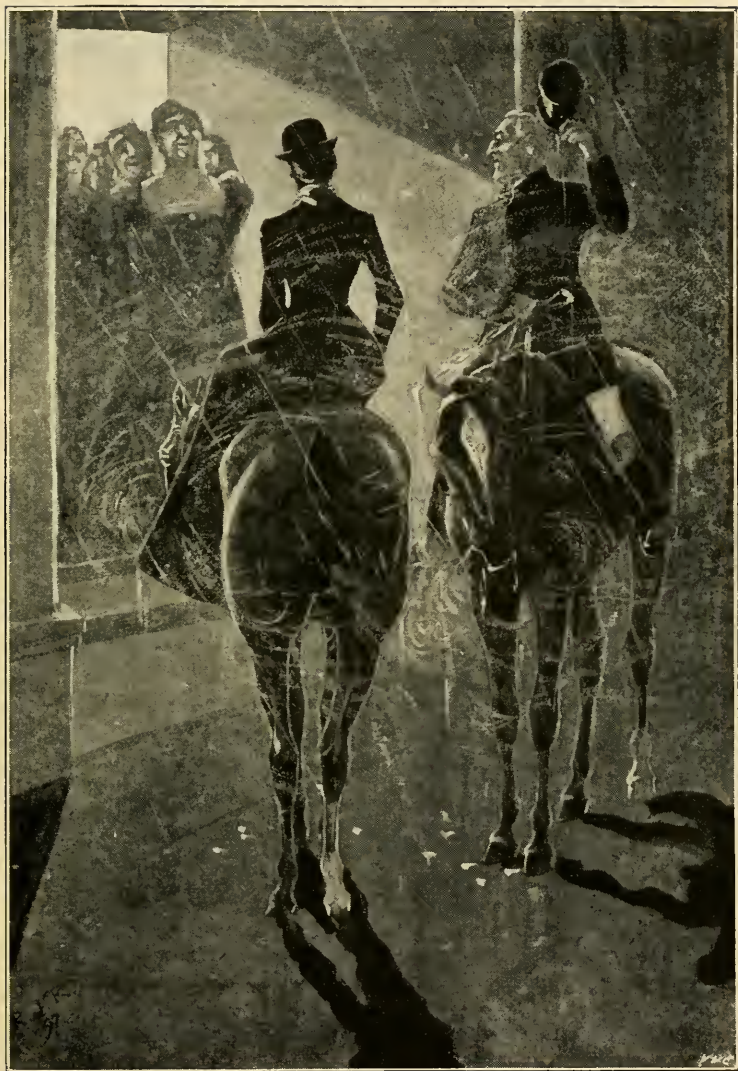
somewhat startled the inmates of The Chase. When a footman appeared in the drawing-room and informed all and sundry that no less a person than THE DUKE and Miss Comely had arrived at the door, Mrs. Binkie cast her new-found dignity to the winds in a flash, and actually caught poor Septimus by the arm and hustled him downstairs and out to the hall door with her, Travers following closely behind, in less than no time. The portals stood wide open, and the light from within was shed upon two of the wettest and most disconsolate-looking figures one could possibly encounter.

The Duke, dripping, but courteous as ever, raised his hat in that *grand seigneur* style which no adverse circumstances could ever alter.

“Pardon me, my dear Madam. I had intended sending up a message, and am quite grieved that you should have come out here to me.” (He might have added, “but directly I mentioned my name, your idiot of a man bolted away like a rabbit!”) “The fact is, Miss Comely here and I are belated fox-hunters, and the Castle being a bachelor establishment” (‘at present,’ murmured Adela to herself), “I have come to beg the favour of a bed at your house——”

“Oh, we shall be so delighted to have a”——“Duke,” she was just going to say, when she suddenly pulled herself up short——“have a bed—two beds, that is——” The Duke coughed——chill, probably, from the wetting he had received——then he stopped the good lady gently, by continuing, “the favour of a bed here for Miss Comely. Lady Comely’s house is at least eight miles farther on, and on such a night——”

“Oh, pray don’t stop out there another minute, your Dukedom,” cried Mrs. Binkie, quite beside herself with joy.



THE DUKE AND ADELA AT THE CHASE.

Although she was deprived of the pleasure of playing hostess to the Duke himself, yet this was certainly the next best thing to it. She was going to shelter one of the Duke's particular friends. "Do come in, both of you, out o' this pourin' rain. Mortimer," this to the butler standing in stately helplessness behind her, "ring for Henry to come from the stables. Travers, go and take the young lady off her horse."

"Oh, really!" began Trousers, wondering how the deuce taking a girl off her horse was to be managed. He went out, however, into the rain, having carefully put his hat on first, and stood at the animal's side, gazing vacantly up at the beautiful, though somewhat dishevelled, vision above him. Then the vision dismounted suddenly, knocking Travers's hat off in her descent, and it rolled away into the mud.

"Are you quite sure it won't put you to any inconvenience, Mrs. Binkie?" asked Adela sweetly.

"Inconvenience! Good gracious me, what next? And with all these lazy fellers loungin' about doin' nothing." (Mr. Mortimer gazed deprecatingly at the floor.) "But I hope His Grace" (she had got it right this time) "is comin' in, too?"

The Duke most courteously declined. The Castle was but a mile and a half away, and he would not any longer risk the chance of his horse catching cold. And with another Grandisonian bow, His Grace trotted sharply off down the gravelled drive, throwing a shilling to the lodge-keeper, who came running out to open the gates, and making direct for home.

Meantime, Adela had been handed over to the care of Penelope, with whom she found herself much more at home

than with Mrs. Binkie, though the last-named lady was doing all she could in the cause of hospitality, delighted at having made such important acquaintances.

A warm bath, and a change into some of Penelope's clothing—which fitted Miss Comely very fairly well—helped considerably in her recovery from the fatigue of the day. A brief application of Penelope's curling tongs, and a glass of very old and choice vintage port, exercised, in their several ways, a cheering effect upon her spirits; and whilst she discussed a very *recherché* little supper in her own room, Penelope sat opposite to her, talking, and the two girls were soon as intimate as if they had known each other all their lives.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BINKIE VISITS CATCHEM COURT.

ADELA departed shortly after breakfast next morning for her home, and some two days later our friend Travers prepared to leave, for a brief period, the parental roof-tree. He was going to stay with his newly-found friends, Sir Toodle and Lady Lumpkin, and their three charming daughters, at Catchem Court. Arrayed in the very latest thing in drab driving coats, adorned with pearl buttons about the size of cheese-plates, and a very 'saucy' looking billycock hat, perched just over the place where the bridge of his nose ought to have been and wasn't, he requested his man to give a final flick with a soft cloth to his resplendent patent-leather boots, and then, at length, completely satisfied with his toilet, he waddled out, and climbed up into the dogcart awaiting him. His two friends were standing at the door to see him off.

"As Jack can't ride the little black horse you can have him for next hunting-day, Tommy," said Binkie condescendingly, as he gathered up his reins.

"I'll see the little black horse d—d first," was the Baronet's vigorous reply. "Why, you can't get the beast over a foot-high gap!"

"Oh, really!" squeaked Travers. "Well, don't say I didn't offer you a mount," and with a grin at his own cleverness he

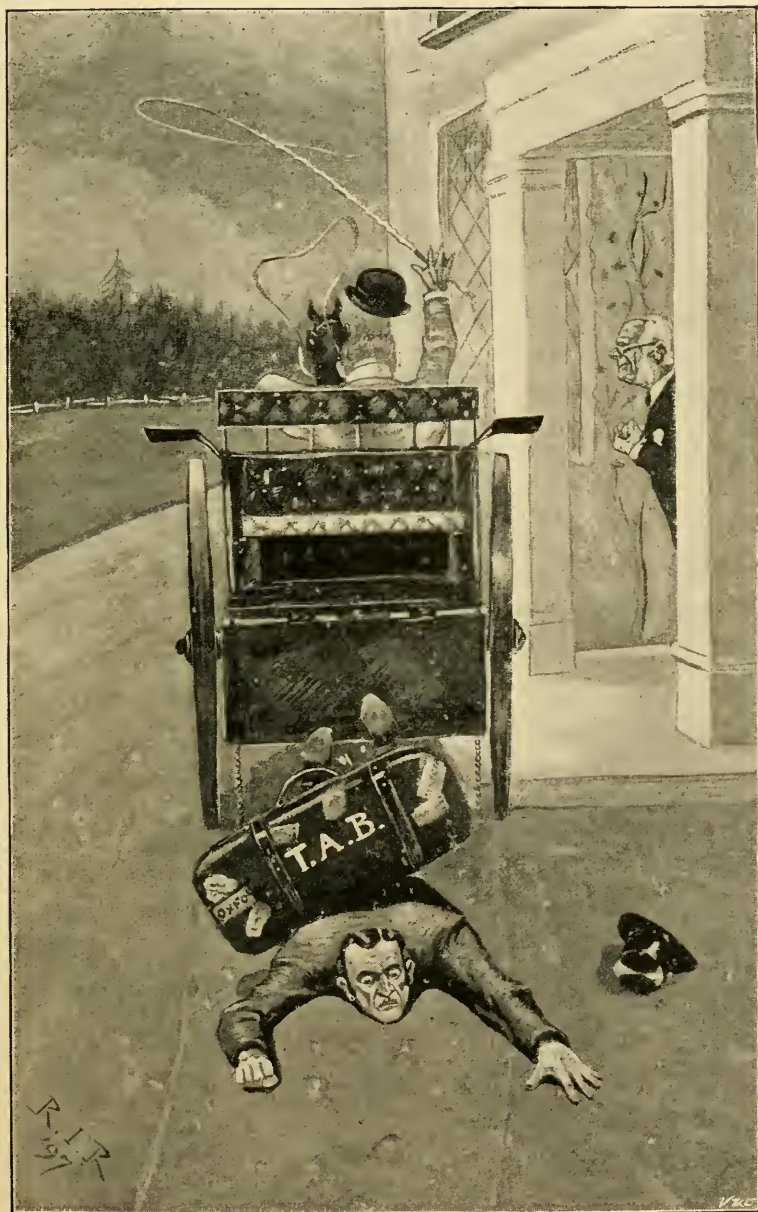
drove off, very nearly taking one of the gate-posts with him as he passed the lodge.

"I suppose he can't help it," ejaculated Mr. Dashwood slowly and deliberately, as he looked down the drive after the retreating dogcart; "but of all the exasperating idiots; of all the cast-iron fools; of all the——"

"Come indoors and smoke the beggar's cigars," interrupted Sir Tommy, taking the speaker by the arm. "It's a much more practical way of revenging yourself upon a man than by abusing him in his absence!" and they repaired indoors to punish the Cabanas and the liquor to their hearts' content.

Meantime, the object of their wrath, very much pleased with himself, and especially with his killing 'get-up,' was driving merrily along, thinking of the fair Lucretia, and of what an easy conquest she would be, if only he considered it 'good enough.' About this he couldn't quite make up what he called (from an excess of courtesy, perhaps) his mind. It would be nice, of course, to be able to allude to 'my father-in-law, Sir Toodle,' or 'my mother-in-law, Lady Lumpkin;' but then, on the other hand, he didn't exactly know whether such a marriage wouldn't rather tie him down and restrict his movements.

"There's Tottie, now. A doosid nice gal, Tottie. I should have to give her up, and it might break her heart. It'd be an awful thing to do that. Then there's that other dear little gal, what would she do if I married? Might go and commit suicide; you never know. Gals are such rum 'uns. And I'm rather a dog, I think. It's awful to be such a universal masher, ain't it?" and Travers winked knowingly at the back



MR. BINKIE ARRIVES.

of his horse's head, and cocked his little hat still farther over his little nose.

A drive of something under an hour brought him within sight of Catchem Court, and as he wound his way through the avenue of poplar trees he saw that the building was a substantial one of the Elizabethan period, heavy, square, and solid-looking. Pretty and well-kept gardens surrounded it on every side, and a small grey stone fountain and sun-dial fronted the main entrance. The appearance of the place greatly impressed our friend, and as though it wanted but a feather's weight to turn the beam of his uncertain mind, he at once decided that should Lucretia prove what he called 'up to sample,' he would—yes, he really thought he would—give her a chance to become Mrs. Travers Algernon.

Driving up to the entrance with a flourish, Mr. Binkie ran his off-wheel pretty hard against the stone step projecting from the doorway, and the sudden jar, whilst merely jerking the driver off his seat on to the floor of the cart, shot the unfortunate servant right out over the tail-board into the gravel path, upon which he fell with a considerable amount of violence; the portmanteau then deliberately tumbled out on top of him.

Whilst master and man picked themselves up, the hall door opened, and Sir Toodle came out in person to welcome his guest.

"Delighted to see you, my dear Mr. Binkie, truly delighted, I'm sure. Your man will—ah—oh, there he is, I see," regarding through his spectacles the discomfited servant, who had just risen, and was violently struggling with the trunk. "Your man will—ah, here is Thomas. Thomas, take Mr. Binkie's trunk to his room. Your hunter has arrived, Mr. Binkie;

came half-an-hour ago. And now come in, come in. Lady Lumpkin and the girls will be impatient to welcome you, I'm sure ;" which last statement was a euphemism, for, as a matter of fact, Binkie had been asked to come in the afternoon, and here he was turning up in time for luncheon. Lady Lumpkin had been at her wits' end when, through the window, she had seen him approaching, for she had nothing to put on the table but the family cold mutton, which she had meant to use up, and start with a 'clean slate' at the first dinner.

She had promptly bundled her three blessings off upstairs to change their frocks, whilst she herself hurriedly went out to interview the cook on the all-important subject of what the latter could produce at that short notice, to put before the untimely guest. That ancient principle—the robbing of Peter for the paying of Paul—came to her aid in this extremity, and two or three things which had been intended to grace the dinner-table were quickly requisitioned for the earlier meal, and thus a fairly respectable show was made.

Binkie entered the morning-room, after divesting himself of his outer coverings, with great jauntiness. He had to be content with his host's company for some time, and then Lady Lumpkin came fussing in, wearing her best company smile. A few minutes afterwards, first one and then another of the younger ladies trickled through the door. Travers ogled and kicked his legs out, and, generally speaking, contrived to look a more egregious ass than usual, the while he thought himself playing the finished 'man about town' to perfection.

After luncheon was over, Lucretia—who had had a tiff with her two sisters that morning as to which of the three was to have 'first run' at Mr. Binkie's face and fortune—resolutely

tacked on to our hero, and took him through the glass-houses, melon-houses, grape-houses, and every other sort of building appertaining to Catchem Court. She showed him the pictures—which were very good; the old china—which was atrocious; and finally her collection of dolls, playful reminiscences of her babyhood—quite recent, one would think, if one judged by her conversation and not by her appearance. Then she, with the kittenish fancy of thirty-four summers, finally put one of the dolls into Mr. Binkie's arms.

“Oh, really!” squeaked Binkie in rather alarmed tones, and looking askance at the doll. “But I say, you know—I—I——”

“Don't you like my pretty doll?” pouted the ripe beauty. “Well, come along then, give the dear to me; I love her. I'll just put them away, and then we'll go and get some tea. I suppose you're going to hunt to-morrow? Colter's Barn, you know, they meet. And we're all coming out in the carriage to see you—what is it? fall off?—no, *throw* off, that's the correct term, isn't it? I do so love hunting—it's so bold of men to hunt, I think, and I do love bold men. All hunting men *must* be brave, I'm sure. I've heard so much about the way you ride with hounds, Mr. Binkie.”

Mr. Binkie looked slightly disconcerted, and rather wished she hadn't.

“Oh, really!” he began, but was saved the effort of any further observations, and his mind relieved at the same moment, as the lady again gave tongue.

“Yes. How bold your riding is, and what terrible horses you always *will* have! I suppose you'll be jumping some dreadful things to-morrow, won't you?”

“Not if I know it!” blurted out Travers. “I—I—I mean, I don’t think there’s anything very big to jump about this part of the country. Is there?” he added, with a ring of anxiety in his voice.

“Oh, I heard Mr. Ronald Dennison say the other day that he considered this quite the biggest country in the Haughtyshire Hunt!”

Binkie’s heart sank into his boots.

“Wouldn’t it be better fun if we went for a drive?” he said. Then, with an air of heroic self-sacrifice, he added—

“Bother hunting! I don’t care a bit about giving up just one day of it. I can always hunt—I can’t always go for a drive with Miss Lumpkin, can I?” and the vacant blue eye ‘goggled’ and rolled as he directed what he thought to be a fatal glance at the lady, who coyly hung her head and blushed becomingly, as she replied—

“Oh, I couldn’t think of letting you give up a day’s hunting just for poor little me! and we’ve heard so much about your reckless riding on that day your dear chestnut horse fell into the dyke, that we all look forward to seeing you jump the big places to-morrow.”

“Oh, really!” Dismal in the extreme was the tone of his voice. He felt a kind of dryness about the lips, and a slight clamminess about his fingers which he had never noticed before.

They were sitting on a deep, comfortable window-seat whilst this conversation was taking place. The lady’s white hands lay idly in her lap. Binkie’s had hitherto been in his pockets, but now he drew them out, and allowed his own left hand—fat, red, and warm as usual—to wander idly away in

the direction of the lady's right. At last (accidentally, of course) they touched. His clasped hers—very gently, so as not to alarm her—and it didn't—and whilst in this attitude, Travers said—

“Wouldn't you *like* me to come in the carriage with you if I said that I *preferred* it to hunting?” and he threw a glance



TRAVERS AND LUTY.

at her which was meant for impassioned love, but which looked more like congenital idiocy.

“Would you prefer it—truthfully?” she murmured, not withdrawing her hand.

“Oh, rather!—I mean, yes—with you!”

And how far matters might have progressed we know not,

for just at that moment the lady's maid—who had a pretty busy time of it, 'valeting' all the four ladies at Catchem Court—came noiselessly along the gallery where the twain were seated, and caught them *in flagrante delicto*, hand in hand. She discreetly coughed, and then announced that tea had been taken into the drawing-room.

The lovers in embryo had, perforce, to rise and rejoin the rest of the family for the purpose of helping to ruin their digestions with weak tea and underdone muffins. The maid disappeared into the servants' hall, muttering to herself—

“Well, I'm sure! pretty goin's on, I must say! 'Ere's my gentleman a deludin' that long-legged, scraggy gal”—she did not waste compliments on any of her mistresses—“and Tottie tellin' me this ever so long ago as he really 'ad promised to marry 'er! At all events, I shall jest write her a note to say 'ow 'e's carryin' on, and leave 'er to do as she likes about it.” And that very evening a letter was duly written and addressed to

Miss Tottie Turnover,
at Mr. Turnover's,
Baker & Confectioner,
Wandell Street,
London.

which said letter might have caused some material diminution of Mr. Binkie's appetite had he only known of it. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he did not—but Fate, that sorry jade whose frowns are many, and whose smiles are few, was brewing a storm above his devoted head, and the lady's maid's missive was the first one of the gathering clouds of which that storm was to be composed.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. BINKIE TAKES THE PLUNGE.

A COMPROMISE was finally effected as to Travers's appearance at covert-side on the morning following his arrival at Catchem Court. He was to ride the trusty old brown horse, and turn up in all the glory of scarlet; but on the other hand, he graciously consented, at the urgent request of Miss Lumpkin, to run no unnecessary risks—a concession which must have cost his martial soul a severe struggle to make. He was also to leave off hunting early in the day, so as to be back in good time for afternoon tea with the ladies.

“I like this plan!” he grinned to himself; “doosid good plan, I call it! I shall be able to show 'em how I look in hunting-kit, and needn't do any of the jumps. Yes, it's rather jolly, all this. And ain't that gal awf'ly fond of me, by Jove! I do like gals when they seem so anxious that a fellow shan't fall off—I mean fall out hunting. It's so much nicer than those sort of gals who hunt themselves, and expect a fellow to go and jump all kinds of beastly places, you know!”

And therefore when our friend appeared at the breakfast-table, so gorgeously arrayed that Solomon in all his glory wouldn't have been 'in it,' he felt no misgivings as to the

day's performance, and what would be expected of him, but in full confidence of kudos without risk, he sat himself down and disposed of a very hearty meal.

As the carriage would only hold four, the youngest Miss Lumpkin was left at home, whilst Sir Toodle and Lady Lumpkin and the two elder Misses Lumpkin crammed themselves into the equipage. Travers's Roman-nosed old hunter was brought round, and Miss Lumpkin watched her admirer rapturously, as he danced about on one foot in wild efforts to mount the horse, which *would* walk calmly off at the wrong moment. At last, however, he succeeded in getting into his saddle, and the whole procession managed to make a start.

Sir Toodle, not being a 'knowledgeable' man in the ways of horseflesh, had not thought to order Mr. Binkie's horse to be brought round earlier than the carriage, so as to enable him to back on quietly to the meet. To him, a horse was a horse—not a hunter—and if the carriage animals could trot all the way, so could the hunter; the consequence of this being that Binkie arrived at the tryst in a state of extreme heat, and mud, and discomfort, which somewhat discomposed him, and also detracted considerably from his personal appearance. Hounds had already cast up, and most of the field also, when the Catchem Court party came upon the scene. Two minutes later, the Duke gave the word to move off, and away they went, Travers still riding beside the Lumpkin carriage.

Penelope Binkie had ridden out to meet Ronald this bright morning, and was now almost at the head of the cavalcade, trotting along with the young barrister, just in rear of Miss

Comely (to whom she had been talking at the meet), the Duke and Lady Lucy Silverton.

“What a pity you can’t induce your people to let you hunt, Miss Binkie, isn’t it?” said Ronald. He was riding his blood-like little grey this morning, and in his hands this very cheap purchase looked as though he might have cost as many pounds as Ronald had given shillings for him.

Penelope sighed. “They don’t much like the idea of my even coming out to the meets,” she answered.

Ronald sighed also. A bad sign this, when two young people of opposite sexes take to conveying their sentiments to each other in sighs instead of words.

“They’ll let you come to our hunt steeplechases, though, won’t they? We are to have them rather earlier than usual, this year.”

“Oh, yes. Shall you be running anything there?”

“I shall enter Marmion for the Duke’s Cup, and shall be riding that big bay of Oakfield’s in the Farmer’s Plate. The Duke always gives a cup, you know.”

And chatting thus, they passed through an open gateway into a field beside a wood, the first covert to be drawn that day.

In return for the hospitality she had received at The Chase, Adela Comely, who knew how matters stood between Ronald and Penelope, had contrived two or three meetings between them, and had also intimated her desire that her mother should call on Mrs. Binkie without delay. Lady Comely had seen the necessity for this, and was only waiting for a day convenient to herself—on which occasion

she devoutly hoped that Mrs. Binkie would be out—to do so. In her heart of hearts, Lady Comely—an aristocrat to the finger-tips—didn't relish the idea of what she called 'hob-nobbing' with Mrs. Septimus, but having accepted a favour at her hands, in the person of Adela, she was far too much of a gentlewoman to leave so great a social debt unpaid.

The whole of the assembled cohort went into the field, by covert-side, with the exception of the carriages. All of these drove farther on up the road, except the Catchem Court vehicle, which, for the express purpose of keeping Travers in view, was stationed at the gateway; a distant sight of the horsemen could still be obtained from this vantage point, and Miss Lumpkin leant well over the side of the carriage, gazing, in order to show her deep interest in our friend. Mr. Binkie stuck his toes well out, made a hollow in his back, and tipped his hat knowingly over his right eye. Presently the wood got musical. Binkie didn't feel quite so comfortable, as he had hoped in his heart that they wouldn't find at all. Whilst the 'pow-wow' was going on, he gently cantered up to the carriage again.

"And now, I suppose, like all the rest of the hunting-men, you're letting your eye rove round in search of the biggest places in the hedge to jump?" cooed Miss Lumpkin, looking up into Travers's vacant face.

Binkie grinned like a sick monkey. Whilst he tacitly accepted this implied compliment to his boundless audacity as a cross-country rider, he entertained in private his own opinion on the subject of jumping big, or in fact, any other 'places.' Cart-ropes and wild horses shouldn't drag him over a fence

of any sort ; he had made up his mind to *that*. But alas ! ‘man proposes,’ etc.

“ I’m going to sacrifice my own sport to-day, for the pleasure of being near you !” he whispered, bending down, and striking his nose on the handle of his awkwardly held crop as he did so. “ After all, you know,” he continued loftily, “ it don’t really mat——” but just at that precise moment, Sir Toodle, who had been gazing amiably through his spectacles down the road during this colloquy, suddenly rose up excitedly in the carriage, and treading hard upon Lady Lumpkin’s toes, called out—

“ Er—ah—excuse me—but er—ah—tally ho !” and drawing a gaily-coloured bandana from his pocket, he waved it airily about, scattering a perfect cloud of tobacco-dust over the occupants of the barouche, and starting them all off in violent paroxysms of sneezing. For Sir Toodle had actually seen a fox come quietly out of covert, drop himself gently down the bank into the lane, and steal away across the road. A minute or two later, and the voice of the Huntsman was heard from the wood, a confused chorus of ‘yaps’ and ‘tow-yows’ from the pack, and then, one after another, hounds emerged from the covert, scrambled down the bank into the lane below, puzzled a few moments over the line, and then crossed the road into the little spinney beyond, where scent lay richly ; and, no longer in any doubt, they threw their tongues with a hearty goodwill that must have struck terror into bold Reynard, travelling such a very little way in front of them.

Then ensued a regular scramble for the gateway into the lane. “ Do get on, there.” “ Now then, sir, do you suppose

we are going to wait while you pull up your girths?" "Oh, do get out of the way, and let me come," etc., etc., etc.; and poor Travers, caught by the head-waters of this rushing stream, was forced, greatly against his will, to make one of the leaders in the charge of cavalry.

Will came hurrying along through the crowd, everyone making way for him, as he crammed and hustled his horse across the road, and at the opposite bank. With a scramble, he got up and over it into the spinney beyond, and Travers, caught in an agony of fear and indecision, was next on the rota. "Should he try it; or would he be likely to slip over his horse's tail if he did? Would it be best——" but an indignant outburst of language from behind, cut short his musings with considerable abruptness.

"Go on, sir!" "Now then, either go yourself, or allow someone else to!" "We can't wait all night here, you know." "Shove him at it!" with an impatient "Gor-bless-my-soul, when-I-was-a-young-man," sort of growl from old Commander Clump R.N., sent Travers, most unwillingly, at the bank—the truth being that he was more frightened to stay behind than to go at the obstacle. The old Roman-nosed brown, half jumped, half climbed up the bank, and although Binkie slipped over the saddle, and very nearly as far as the root of his horse's tail, he still, by strenuous exertions, avoided the crowning catastrophe of sliding right off, and sitting down in the lane. Once over the obstacle, he waxed valiant, and galloped along through the spinney, close after the Huntsman's horse. On they went, dodging a branch here and a stub there, swerving aside to miss a boggy patch to the right, turning quickly to avoid a slab of stone on the left. Hounds were



Travers up a Tree.

running ahead down the ride, as hard as they could go, and Travers was thinking to himself how much he would like hunting if it were all like this, without any jumping, when with a violence which knocked all the wind clean out of him, he wrapped himself round the overhanging arm of a tree, to which he wildly clung, as his steed galloped gaily away from under him.

“ Oh, really ! ” gasped poor Binkie.

Luckily for him, our friend found that the rest of the field had gone round the outside of the spinney, instead of following him through the ride. He dropped gently to earth again, and when his normal breathing powers were quite restored, trudged off up the wood, to see if he could find any trace of his errant horse. The old fellow had not gone more than two hundred yards from where he had left his owner, before getting one foreleg through the reins. This, as may well be imagined, had considerably hampered his movements, and soon afterwards he had contrived to hitch himself up in almost inextricable confusion to the lower branches of a tree, where Travers, fortunately, found him, and after about a quarter of an hour's work freed him from his entanglement. Our hero then got on his back, and proceeded to essay the task of finding his way home. It was rather a long business, and he did not cast up at Catchem Court until some time past the usual luncheon hour.

Lucretia came running out into the hall to meet him.

“ How splendidly he had led the whole field at that dreadful-looking bank ! and how naughty it was of him, after promising her—yes, *promising* her faithfully, that he wouldn't run any risks ! She was afraid he was not to be trusted ! ” and Binkie's vacuous eye goggled at her as he put on a very knowing look,

kicked his legs about, and murmured that he really hadn't been able to resist the temptation when the time actually came.

"And had you a fine run?" asked Miss Lumpkin.

"Oh, beautiful!" replied Mr. Binkie, who had been with hounds about three minutes in all.

"And where did you run to?" queried the fair one, really imagining that she was pleasing him by seeming to take an interest in hunting: "Where did you run to?"

Binkie hadn't the faintest notion, so he said vaguely that they 'ran over a lot of fields, you know—some grass and some plough—jumps? Oh, yes, awful jumps—what sort? Oh, hedges and ditches and things—all that sort of thing, don't you know. And now he really thought he'd go upstairs and take off his hunting things, and get into something a bit more comfortable, you know.' And under cover of this, he at length escaped from Lucretia's slightly embarrassing questions.

Mr. Binkie graciously acceded to his host's suggestion that he should stay on with them over the Sunday, and not leave till Monday at midday. He and the fair Lucretia sat in each other's pockets all that evening, looking, from time to time, unutterable things into each other's eyes. Mamma Lumpkin gazed at the performance with evident approval, and after retiring for the night she said impressively to her husband—

"Toodle, I smell a rat!"

"Do you, indeed, my dear? That's very unpleasant. I—I—" (sniffing very hard) "I don't smell anything of the kind myself."

"No, no!" exclaimed the lady impatiently, "I mean that there's really something on the *tapis* between that young fellow and Luty."

"Think so, my dear?" and the tone was rather that of the unbeliever. Sir Toodle had seen this fair bait nibbled at once or twice before, but nothing had come of it, and 'hope deferred,' etc.

"I do. You see, he is a perfect idiot——"

"Yes, that's in our favour, certainly."

"——and must get a tremendous lot of money when the old man dies. You know, there's only one other child, and they are pretty well sure to have it all divided between them; perhaps the——"

"——idiot," mildly suggested Sir Toodle.

"——young man will even get the larger share. In either case the father is sure to come down with a big allowance on the boy's marriage. Terrible old couple, the mother and father—you saw them at the Hunt Ball, you know; still, Luty is not quite so young as she was, and I think—I really do think—it would be a very good thing for her."

For truth to tell, Luty's combative spirit had always been somewhat of an exhausting factor in the home tranquillity of Catchem Court—she was, as her father used to say, 'a trifle wearing.'

Sir Toodle said nothing as he bent forward over the mirror, and carefully completed the tallowing of his nose. He had caught cold on the drive home from the meet that day. Then, blowing out the candle, he sententiously remarked—

"At all events, my dear, it would be a very good thing for *us*!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AFFAIRS MATRIMONIAL.

As the direct upshot of those little meetings at covert-side and elsewhere, between Ronald Dennison and Penelope, the gentleman in question had thoroughly made up his mind that, being genuinely in love with the possessor of the fairy face and willowy figure, he would put his fate to the test without any further delay. Not that he felt much doubt about the lady's decision, and surely few men in real life are so dense as to be unable to read the answer to that all-important question before it is asked. But, speaking generally, most men are pretty sure of not being met by a refusal when the momentous query is put; if they were not thus sure, probably the boon would never be asked at all. Accordingly, Mr. Dennison, taking advantage of a chance meeting with the object of his affections, on the Sunday following the day on which Travers had hung himself up in the tree, spoke that which was in his heart. Penelope was taking a sharp walk in the direction of the post-office, whilst Ronald had been paying his usual Sunday afternoon visit to the kennels, when they met.

"Which way are you going, Miss Binkie—to the post?" said he, as he raised his cap. And on the lady's smilingly admitting this to be her destination, he added mendaciously,

“So was I. May I walk with you?” and it was easy to guess what the answer would be.

Reader, I will spare you the ensuing scene. You and I have both been through it—‘more than once,’ did you say? Ah, very likely. And I’ve always heard that there’s a painful want of variety about such performances. Haven’t you?

“I’m awfully poor,” sighed Ronald, “I don’t feel at all certain about your father ever giving his consent, but I must try.”

“But we—that is, my father is rich, so that won’t matter, will it?”

“Yes, dear. That’s just what will matter, worse luck. You see, in this world, a man who is rich doesn’t think much of one who isn’t. If the daughter of Dives marries, it isn’t necessary that the man she weds should possess any qualification except that he should be rich also. If a poor man falls in love with her, he must necessarily be a scoundrel and an adventurer, according to the world’s estimate. It’s an awful and an unjust doctrine; nevertheless, it’s the one favoured by all civilized nations.”

“Surely, if one or other has money——” began Penelope, her pretty eyes half filling with tears.

“No, dearest one, that’s just it. If both were poor—hadn’t, in fact, anything to live on, people would say: ‘Oh, well, he (or she) couldn’t hope to do any better;’ and again, if both were rich, it would be all right. However, I’m not absolutely penniless, and I’ve always got my profession as a barrister to fall back upon. Unfortunately, it’s a precious poor fall-back. I practised for five years and never made a hundred a year at it. All the briefs and all the prizes at the Bar fall to those who have interest; and I have none. But at all events, I’ll

go to your father and ask his consent to-morrow. Then we shall hear what he says."

And so they parted, Ronald with a new sense of responsibility on his mind, which depressed, but at the same time pleased him.

Whilst this little love scene was enacting outside the gates of The Chase, Travers and Lucretia were what the former called 'going it' in the drawing-room of Catchem Court; for they were sitting hand-in-hand on the sofa, and the susceptible Trousers had just taken the plunge, and asked Luty to be his own, his very own, and Luty had consented to be a party to that ultra-proprietary arrangement.

On the following day Travers arrived home, and started at once for the study to 'tell Pa' the great news. He was gently restrained by the gorgeous Mortimer, who informed him that Mr. Ronald Dennison was, at that moment, interviewing Mr. Septimus Binkie in his own apartment. Travers therefore postponed his own important announcement for the moment, and went upstairs to find Jack and Sir Tommy. The former, wearing a gaudily-trimmed loose silk dressing jacket of Travers's, was gracefully reclining in an easy-chair, his feet resting on the mantelpiece, and 'Jorrocks' set upon the natural reading-desk made of his legs. Sir Tommy was perusing the *Sporting Life* and marking down what he called 'a snip' for a steeplechase at Kempton, and both gentlemen were pulling away contentedly at their host's Cabanas.

"Come in, old chap!" exclaimed Jack, as if he were welcoming a guest, "you'll find a chair somewhere or other. And how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Oh, I've had a doosid fine time! Are those letters for

me? Chuck 'em over, will you? Hullo, this looks as if it came from a lady, eh?" and Travers grinned knowingly.



IN TRAVERS'S DEN.

"Well, it looks as if it came from a female," replied Tommy guardedly, and then Mr. Binkie began reading.

At their interview, Ronald frankly told Mr. Binkie of his

love for Penelope, and also of his own exceedingly small income. At the same moment he offered to at once resign his present happy-go-lucky style of life, and try anew his fortune at the Bar.

Septimus pursed up his mouth, and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets.

“Ha, b'm, and how do you propose to set up an establishment and keep a wife, hey? What's your idea?”

Now, this extremely commercial way of looking at things was rather embarrassing to Mr. Dennison. Birth, position, youth, good looks, the profession of a gentleman, all these might well and reasonably have been thrown into the balance, but then it did not lie in his own mouth to put such matters forward. The worthy inventor of Binkie's Composites asked no question as to moral fitness; that never seemed to enter into his head. All he asked was, virtually, and put into plain language: “How many golden sovereigns have you got?” And Mr. Binkie was not alone in this. The vast majority of the fathers of to-day never ask a man what he *is*; they always ask him what he *has*; it seems to be such a much more interesting subject.

Of course, poor Ronald's reply to this direct question was rather nebulous, and equally of course it never occurred to Mr. Septimus Binkie that, were he to allow his daughter a few hundreds, out of his many thousands a year—to give her, in fact, an income equal to that which Ronald Dennison had himself, that he could make two worthy young people supremely happy; and so the interview ended in the way such interviews usually do end, and Ronald rose to leave, not in the least intending to give up Penelope, but

certainly 'pegged back,' as far as the immediate future was concerned.

As he closed the door behind him, he was confronted by Travers; that young gentleman's face was even more pasty than usual, and he gasped rather than said—

"Oh! I say, you're a sort of a lawyer, ain't you? That is, a barrister, I mean? Well, do come into my room for a few minutes, and tell me wha-wha-what the devil I'm to do! It's awful! It really is doosid awful!" and consumed by astonishment, Ronald followed our hero into the little den, where his two Ringnose friends still sat placidly smoking.

Passing a fat red paw over his dank hair and perspiring brow, Binkie stood at the end of the table, and from a pink sheet of note-paper with scalloped edges, which he held in his hand, read out, in trembling accents, the following—

"WANDELL STREET, LONDON.

"MY ONCE DEAR HALGY,

"It canot bee oh no it canot bee that you would play me false but ow am i to understand setch conduct of yours wen told it by a *friend* who shall be *naimless* i mean that ther is a roomer you are injaged to bee marrid too a certain Miss Lumking. tell me its not true i canot berleeve it off you. you know that you always give me too understand that i wos to bee the Wun, an i ave yr own letters too proove it, has you know, Halgy. Hear is what you wrote me larst year, copid out; i keep the origginule.

"'if ever I marry I shall apply at your shop in Wandell street, for all the requisites.'

“and shurely the first requisite for a marridge is A Bride, so there. write and tel me all is false or never see me agane.

“TOTTIE.

“p.S.—i ave alreddy showed the leter too a solissyter who ses it is ‘good biz.’”

Travers finished reading this precious missive, and dropped helplessly into the seat at his side. Then, letting his face sink into his hands, he groaned—

“And I was just engaged to be married, too!”

Ronald sat on, thinking over the situation. Sir Tommy and Jack quietly sneaked off out of the room to save themselves any trouble in the matter. If Binkie liked to be such a fool, etc., etc., they said, it was no business of theirs. And if he was ‘on the marry,’ well, he wouldn’t be much more good to them anyhow, so he and his affairs might ‘rip,’ for all they cared.

After a prolonged pause, varied at intervals by Binkie’s hollow groans, Ronald spoke—

“Is that the only letter she has of yours?”

“I—I—think so. And I never had the faintest idea of marrying her, you know. I *have* fooled about. You remember seeing her with me at Aldridge’s, that day, and I told you she wasn’t quite——”

“Quite—yes, I remember. Well, it looks as though she means mischief, and she’s apparently gone to one of these scoundrelly lawyers who make a practice, such as it is, out of taking up shady and speculative cases. But if that’s really all the proof she can show of an engagement to marry, why, I think I can promise you a safe deliverance.”

“It’s so awful sad, too, to have to part with her—such a jolly sort of gal and so doosid fond of me, too! I don’t know, I’m sure, how I shall ever live without her.”

“Yes, that’s all very well, but when a woman hints at legal proceedings against a man, it’s about time that he gave up sentiment, and looked to defending himself, I think,” said Ronald decisively.

“I say, Dennison, if—if—if she really should begin an action for breach of promise, you’ll defend me, won’t you, like a good chap? I should feel safer in the hands of a friend, you know.”

“Certainly I will, if you really wish it, though I should have thought you’d have had more confidence in a man who was in court every day of his life, than in me. However, that’s just as you like. And now I must be going, so good-bye!” and shaking hands, Ronald took his departure—after a meeting (purely accidental, of course) with Penelope on the stairs, a stolen kiss, and a hurried exchange of rings.

After half-an-hour’s abandonment to black despair, the wretched Travers raised his head from the table where it had been reposing, seized a pen, paper, and envelopes, and laboriously composed the following missive—

“THE CHASE.

“MY DEAR TOTTIE,

“I was awfully surprised and grieved to receive your letter to-day. It has made me feel quite upset to-day. You know I have always thought so much about you and done all I could to help your father’s business. Think of the number of tarts I’ve eaten when I really didn’t want them, and all for

the good of the house; and think also of all the cherry brandies at 6*d.* a glass I've drunk—and that reminds me, I don't believe you are licensed to be drunk on your premises, are you? So I've done all I could in that way. Also the things I've given you. I enclose list of everything I can think of, but am sure there are more which perhaps you will recollect. I always loved you, but there was the gulf of trade between us, and I could not marry you. You must see this yourself, *i.e.* that you couldn't marry a county family (*sic*). As to the letter I wrote, I meant if ever I married, I'd have the wedding-breakfast at your shop. But in conclusion, I might marry you some day or other (who knows?) that is, if you don't put the matter into a beastly lawyer's hands, because they are interfering people, who I don't like.

“Yours as ever,

“A. T. BINKIE.”

And the reply to this somewhat injudicious letter was contained in a black bag, carried by a seedy-looking, middle-aged man, who called at The Chase two days later, and asked for Mr. Binkie Junior. On the appearance of that gentleman, the middle-aged man politely asked him for his name, and on receiving an answer, presented him with a paper bearing the printed heading of ‘VICTORIA, by the Grace,’ etc., and setting forth that this was the writ in an action of ‘Turnover *v.* Binkie’ for damages (which were modestly laid at £5,000) for breach of a promise to marry.

“Oh, really!” murmured Binkie in plaintive tones, and almost dissolving into tears as he stood helplessly in the hall, the writ fluttering about in his hands. The middle-aged

gentleman, his mission thus satisfactorily accomplished, bowed himself out, and down the front-door steps.

‘It never rains but it pours,’ and to put the finishing touch on poor Trousers’s burden of woe, he received, that



THE WRIT.

evening, a polite note, bearing the address of Catchem Court upon the back of the envelope. It ran as follows—

“CATCHEM COURT.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“I understand from my daughter Lucretia, that whilst staying with us here, you did her and ourselves—I speak with the full concurrence of my wife—the great honour of proposing for her hand. I could have wished, perhaps, that you had

H.H.

O

spoken to me at the time, but doubtless you had your own reasons for not doing so, and we will say no more about that. I am anxious to see you as soon as possible, and I am sure you will forgive a parent's solicitude on such an all-important subject as the future of his child. I may perhaps, without indiscretion, add that your coming is anxiously looked forward to by a certain member of our family whom I suppose I need not further specify. [A ponderous attempt on the part of Sir Toodle at being playfully facetious.] So, my dear sir, come over to see us and let us get all the troublesome lawyer's business [Travers groaned aloud] over and done with. Lady Lumpkin—who, I may remark, *en passant*, was greatly taken with you when you were staying with us—joins me in kindest regards, and intends after we have had an interview with you, and matters have been placed on a satisfactory footing, to do herself the honour and pleasure of calling upon Mrs. Binkie at The Chase.

“ Believe me, my dear sir,

“ Very truly yours,

“ TOODLE LUMPKIN.

“ P.S.—Perhaps if you yourself are unacquainted with the details of business matters, you would prefer me to see your excellent father on these points.”

The letter fluttered quietly down to the ground from the nerveless fingers, and Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie took to his bed.

CHAPTER XV.

NOEL-TIDE.

CHRISTMAS came on apace, but the approach of the so-called festive season hardly brought much joy into the home at The Chase. Penelope moped, dull and disconsolate, the only bright beams which came across her mental horizon being an occasional stolen meeting with her constant lover. Travers, between the two terrible fires of Catchem Court on the one hand, and the action of 'Turnover *v.* Binkie' on the other, was in the depths of despair. Mr. Septimus Binkie looked glum at the thought of having to very possibly pay up substantial damages on behalf of his precious son; whilst Mrs. Septimus was furious at the thought of such a 'low-born hussy' daring to think of an alliance with the family of a Merchant Prince. She, good lady, was also rather in doubt about the wisdom of refusing Ronald Dennison as her son-in-law. If he had no money, he was certainly 'County,' and went into the best society; he was also good-looking, well dressed, a hunting man, and received on terms of perfect equality at the Duke's. She really couldn't make up her mind whether he ought not to be brought back again, but—and at this point it was that her reflections were always broken off in an abrupt fashion. She really did *not* know what to do, or how to advise, or rather command, for the best.

"Sep," she said suddenly, one afternoon—it was the day preceding Christmas Eve, and Penelope had gone for a solitary walk—not to meet Ronald; only that she happened—what, you don't believe it? Oh, very well, then, it's no good my saying that it was an accident.

"Sep," repeated that gentleman's better half, "don't you think, perhaps, that you was a fool to refuse that young Dennison?"

"Yes, my dear, if *you* think so," replied he discreetly. It came so much cheaper in the end to agree with Mrs. Septimus, and enabled him the sooner to get his afternoon nap.

"Of course there's the objection that he hasn't got any money——"

"Any money," echoed Sep faintly.

"Nor prospects of ever getting any."

"Getting any," smothering a yawn.

"But there, he's a real gentleman, you see; and what's more, he looks it."

"Looks it," in still fainter tones from Sep.

"Looks what?" queried the lady sharply.

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear. What was it you were saying?"

"You're half asleep, Septimus, that's what it is. It's no good trying to get any sense out of a man that's always thinking either of his stom——"

"Cecilia!"

"Well, his inside, then, if that's more genteel, and of going to sleep directly after he's done eatin'. I'm not sure it wouldn't be best still, to give Penelly—the gal's cryin' her eyes out for him, I can see—to give Penelly five 'undred

a year—you'd never even miss that, you know, Sep—and let 'em marry. It seems to me it's the only way we shall ever get into society, now. As to that stoopid boy of ours, *he'll* never be any good to us, that's certain, as he's got into this mess. I'm afraid the Catchem Court people won't even look at him, now, and Dennison's a very pop'lar man, all round. And—and—" (and this had been working powerfully in Mrs. Binkie's mind, for the past week), "and he's got that Prince feller stoppin' with him, and I should awf'ly like to have him here and entertain him so as all the people round about should hear of it. If we could only get him up to The Chase to spend Christmas Day, now!" and Mrs. Binkie clasped her hands ecstatically, at the thought of so much glory as entertaining a real live Indian Prince. She sank into a state of deep thought for a time, and then looked up to see her lord peacefully dozing in his arm-chair by the fire.

"Sep," she cried shrilly. The unfortunate gentleman woke with so violent a start that he nearly fell out of his chair.

"Yes, my dear?"

"I have it!"

"Have you, indeed?"

"We'll write to Dennison and say that while withholding our consent for the time bein', we do not forbid his comin' to the house. We will allow the young people to meet, on strict condition that we're not to be taken to consent—not at present, anyhow—and I shall ask him to come and dine with us Christmas Day, and bring his friend, the Prince. Who knows but what Penelly might change her mind and take

up with the great Pottentate himself? Might like to become a princess, you know."

"What! to a nigger!" exclaimed Mr. Binkie, aghast, all his insular notions rising in revolt at such a thought.

"Indian princes are not niggers, Mr. Binkie," said the lady reprovingly, "and would not thank you for calling them such. I shall ask Dennison to come and bring his friend;" and without more ado Mrs. Binkie walked over to a Davenport standing in one of the window recesses, and indited her note in a big, sprawling hand, asking for the pleasure of Mr. Ronald Dennison's and friend's company at dinner, on Christmas Day.

Mrs. Binkie addressed the envelope, and looking up, said—

"Of course, it'll be only an *ong famille* dinner. I've told him that. I suppose princes don't mind *ong famille* dinners? Anyhow, we must chance it."

But Sep was again asleep, and her words simply lost themselves in space.

When Mrs. Binkie conveyed the news of the invitation given to Mr. Dennison for Christmas Day, Penelope's whole manner changed as though by magic. Not only would she have her lover at her side then, but she could not fail to see that this was the 'beginning of the end,' as far as serious opposition went, to their ultimate marriage. Her heart rejoiced therefore, and she was at no pains to conceal the fact.

Poor Travers had already written a temporising letter in reply to the one from Sir Toodle. He had said that he was far from well just at present—was, in fact, suffering from shock (which was perfectly true), but that he would

again communicate with Sir Toodle when he felt sufficiently recovered to do so.

The Lumpkins couldn't make this out at all. Mr. Binkie had seemed perfectly well in health when he left them, and even now he didn't allege any specific illness, but only that he was suffering from a shock. What shock? Sir Toodle couldn't understand it; Lady Lumpkin couldn't understand it, neither could the three Misses Lumpkin grasp its meaning. Lucretia was a trifle dashed, but she was none the less determined. She had waited all these years for an offer; now she had got one, she was hardly the person to let it slip.

On Christmas Day the two invited guests, Ronald Dennison and his Indian friend—who had been a college chum of his, ten years before, and, as an enthusiastic horseman, had determined to revisit England for a little hunting in the shires—duly arrived ten minutes before the dinner-hour.

“Very kind of you to ask two lone males to share your hospitality, Mrs. Binkie, to-day,” said Ronald as he shook hands with his hostess. “Let me introduce Prince Baboojee Hurrycuree, of Chutneepore, an old friend of mine, and a great sportsman. He's having a little hunting with me, just at present.”

The Prince bowed courteously over Mrs. Binkie's hand. He was an extremely good-looking young man, and not so dark as the majority of Orientals. The enterprising hostess at once began to think of possibilities in the way of a Prince for a son-in-law. Perhaps this love affair of 'Penelly's' with Ronald was only skin-deep—they had known each other only so short a time; and then she thought to herself that the name 'Princess Penelope' sounded almost regal in its magnificence.

Jack Dashwood and Sir Tommy, together with the Binkie family, made up the dinner-party. Sep had, on more than one occasion, asked Travers when he thought his two limpet-like friends were going to terminate their visit to The Chase, but had been quite unable to obtain the slightest information on the subject. They seemed to be permanently rooted to the soil—fixtures of the house, in fact.

During the whole of dinner Mrs. Binkie laid herself out to the congenial task of cold-shouldering Ronald in favour of Ronald's dusky friend, who, she found, spoke the Queen's English a great deal better than she did herself.

After the distinguished guest had said that he liked everything in England except its terrible climate, his hostess took up the running: "And you really like England better than India; do you now, indeed? Ah, well, I don't wonder at it, I'm sure. I think it shows your good taste. And English institutions and customs, too? You like them better than the Eastern ones? Such, for instance, as only having one wife. You approve of that, Prince?"

His Highness bowed smilingly. "Certainly I do," he replied.

Mrs. Binkie shot a malicious glance in the direction of Ronald, who was saying something to Penelope.

"And do you approve of Indian gentlemen marrying English ladies?"

"Why not? We are all subjects of the Queen. I personally am particularly favourable to such marriages——" Here Mrs. Binkie, as she saw the Prince's eye wander down the table till it rested on Penelope's beautiful face, glowed with the triumph of a possible near victory. "My daughter, the

Princess.' Oh, could Fate really have such glory in store for a family risen to affluence upon Binkie's Composites?



AN OLD DOG FOX.

And then the mellifluous voice of the Prince went on to the conclusion of his sentence—

“—for, eight years ago, I married an English lady,

who, curiously enough, somewhat resembles your beautiful daughter."

A married man! Poor Mrs. Binkie's hopes were crushed again to the earth. A moment before, and she had been apostrophising the fickle goddess in most humble though expectant terms. Now she would have liked to have taken the hussy by the shoulders and given her a good shaking. It was not until the close of that evening that she properly recovered herself, and then, under cover of a brilliant performance on the piano by the Indian Prince—a perfect musician—she drew Ronald a little on one side, and in low tones said to him—

"Now, Mr. Dennison, I think things ought to be put straight between us. I don't like going on in what I call a hugger-mugger way. You haven't got the money to keep Penelly as a wife ought to be kept. Well, we—me and Sep—have, and as I like you I've a mind to see if we can't do something for you. But look here—you're to appear as Counsel for my boy in this breach of promise case. Now, you must get him off, do you see?"

"Of course I'll do my best for him, Mrs. Binkie, you may depend upon that; but as to persuading the jury to give a verdict for the defendant, that's another matter. You see, in all these cases of breach of promise the juries' sympathies invariably seem to lie with the fair plaintiff."

Mrs. Binkie looked vexed. Then she went on—

"It ain't for the money. We'd pay that—if it wasn't too much; of course this five thousand claim's quite out of the question—but I don't want a verdict given against us. You see?"

“ I see. But how am I—— ? ”

“ That’s your business, not mine. But as every labourer is worthy of his hire, I’ll make you this offer : if no verdict is given against us in this action——bother ! he’s stopped playin’——never mind, you go over and talk to the rest and I’ll just write it down in pencil on the back of this card, and give it you when you go.”

Ronald rose in obedience to the commands of his hostess, and went across the room to join the group at the piano. They persuaded the Prince to play another piece ; then Penelope, in a sweet, if not very strong voice, sang the air of an old-fashioned Christmas carol, and in this way the rest of the evening passed rapidly and pleasantly away. When the visitors rose to take their departure, Mrs. Binkie, in saying good-night to Ronald, slipped an ordinary visiting-card into his hand (a little awkward this, as Penelope had just previously placed in the same receptacle a dear little three-cornered note, expressive, as Ronald afterwards found, of her undying devotion and her determination to marry him and no other man ‘in the wide, wide world’). He and the Prince then wrapped their fur coats about them, and tramped off through the snow in the direction of their rooms. The stars shone bright and hard, and an old dog fox crossed their path near the shrubbery, wending his way towards the house. As soon as they got into their rooms, Ronald turned up the lamp, drew Mrs. Binkie’s card from his pocket and read as follows—

“ If we win the case of ‘ Turnover *v.* Binkie ’ you have my consent to marry Penelope.

“ C. B.”

After that ten days or so of frost at Christmas-time, our friends were able to resume hunting. Travers, who had slightly recovered his spirits and 'moral tone' as the family physician euphoniously called it, played the part alternately of hunter and hunted—for he was as often the quarry of the fair Lucretia, as was the fox his own. Nothing fresh had been heard of the great suit of 'Turnover *v.* Binkie'—at least, by Travers himself—the lawyers were hurling 'pleadings' and other dangerous missiles at each other, with their tongues in their cheeks as they reckoned up what a fat bill-of-costs they would presently have against their respective clients—but our fat friend, hearing nothing more on the subject, concluded to let matters slide, and thus regained his confidence and courage.

And so it was that he managed to pay his *devoirs* once more to the fair lady of Catchem Court, and explain away, in stupid, hesitating fashion, the original hitch in the matrimonial negotiations. That terrible interview in the study with Papa had been satisfactorily negotiated, and proved to be not such a big fence as Mr. Binkie had at first feared; the fact being that the powers at the Court were of that self-sacrificing kind which suffers much, rather than fails to achieve its object. True, Lady Lumpkin had, at first, exclaimed gushingly—

“Oh, I'm sure we could never, no never, spare Lucretia!”

However, in the result, they 'spared' her to Travers, and let us hope that he was duly sensible of the immensity of the favour so conferred. And then, as soon as it was publicly made known that Lucretia Lumpkin was engaged to be married to the hope of The Chase, Lady Lumpkin drove over and made a formal call on Mrs. Binkie.

It would be stretching the bounds of strict veracity to say that the interview was a particularly cordial one. Lady Lumpkin, although obliged, by the exigencies of the case, to be civil, came away 'horrified, quite too horrified,' as she expressed it to her second daughter, who waited for her in the carriage outside, 'with that awful woman's vulgarity!' and Mrs. Binkie, on her part, confided to Sep that she never met anybody more 'top-loftical' (whatever that might mean) than Lady Lumpkin. "Oh, she's that haughty and overbearin' I couldn't stand the woman at all, that I couldn't. Our boy'll have a nice time of it with her for a mother-in-law, I'm thinking!" And to tell the truth, our friend Trousers had, in secret, cherished much the same idea. Luty also, now she was firmly settled in the saddle as an engaged young woman, was not quite so pleasant a companion as she had been beforehand. The combative side of her disposition was given rather too free a rein, and poor Travers lived in a continual state of being snubbed and put in his place; a condition of things which did not agree with that young gentleman at all.

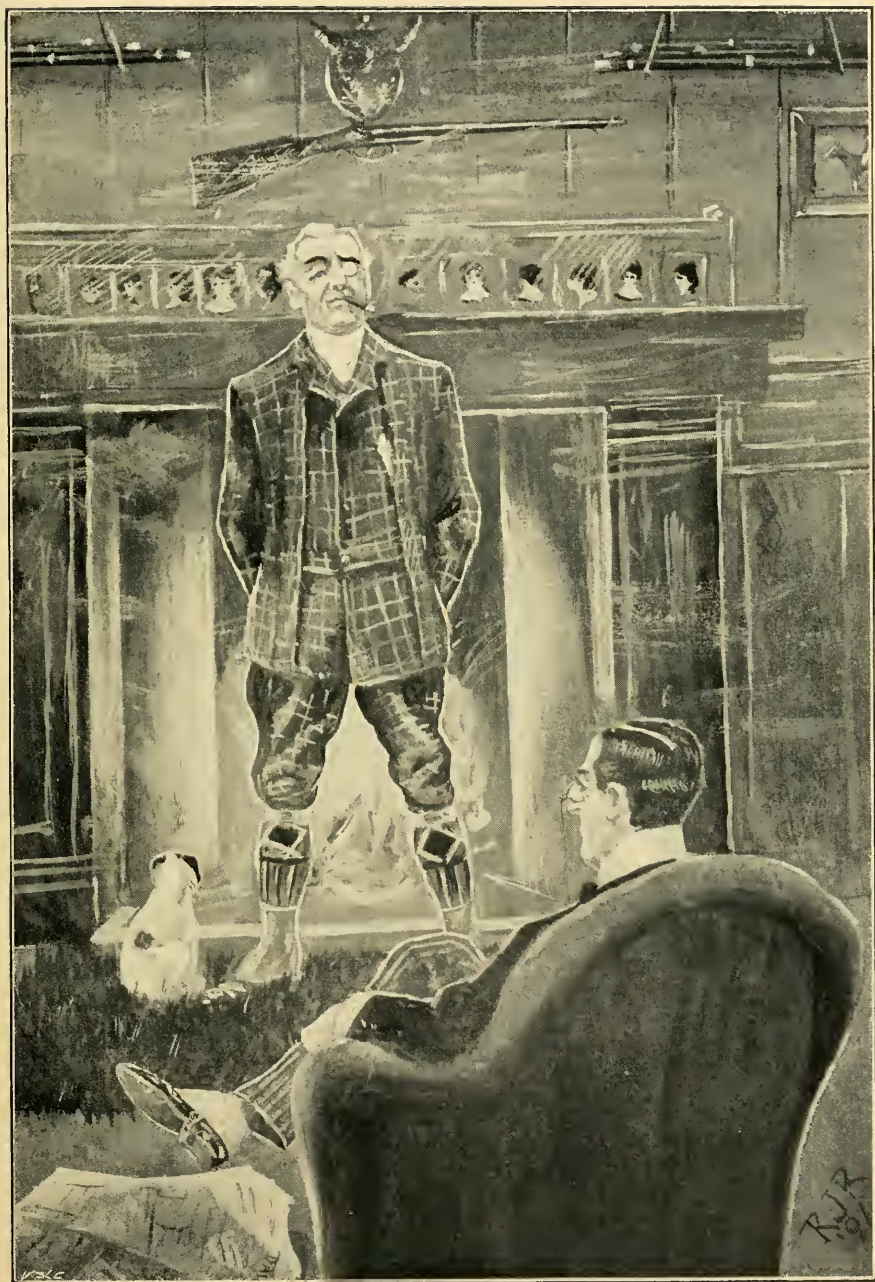
The month of February waned, the Ides of March drew on. Sir Tommy and Jack, at a long and earnest consultation, held in Travers's room, and by the aid of that estimable person's cigars and whisky, had come to the conclusion that although the house was dull, still that (having nowhere better to go) they would stay on, and see the season out.

The Hunt steeplechases were fixed for the end of March, and Ronald was reserving Marmion for the principal event. It was not a question of getting the horse fit—he was ready to run for a man's life—but of keeping him so, and not overdoing

him with long, tiring work after hounds. The chestnut was, therefore, only treated to short days, and not chanced at awkward places out hunting. Ronald had set his heart on winning with him, and, 'bar accident,' was feeling very confident indeed.

In a moment of weakness, Travers, being rather thereunto urged by his inamorata, had intimated his intention of disporting himself in the saddle at the steeplechases. So confident was he in the wonderful steadiness of the Roman-nosed old brown, that he argued to himself he absolutely could not get a fall; the old chap didn't seem to know how to make a mistake. Of course, his only chance to win would be that all the rest fell down, but that matter didn't concern our hero in the least degree; he only wanted the opportunity of showing himself in gala attire, and the glory of being 'one of the riders.' The fact that his horse couldn't really go fast enough to keep himself warm was entirely foreign to the subject, from his point of view. Safety and glory must walk hand-in-hand, otherwise glory would go out in the betting to a thousand to six and no takers!

Slowly, but none the less surely, was the fascinating Adela creeping into the affections of the Duke of Haughtyshire, to the exclusion of all the other 'female forms divine,' which were wont, of yore, to flit before the Ducal mind's eye. In short, the noble M. F. H. had almost determined that if he could but manage to pluck up courage enough to ask his son's consent, he would take the plunge and bring home a fresh Duchess to the Castle. But Gravity—yes, Gravity was what is vulgarly called a 'sticker.' His Grace really began to show signs of being genuinely 'caught,' and



In the Duke's Sanctum.

incontinently ceased from whistling that naughty little song he had heard at the Folies-Bergère when he was last in the gay capital, and substituted for it snatches of Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March.' Gravity noted all these signs, but without manifesting such marks of disapproval as might have been reasonably expected.

One day the Duke ventured—rather by way of a 'feeler'—to say to his son and heir—

"My dear boy, I rather wonder you don't entertain some idea of—of—" (he was about to say "settling down," but checked himself abruptly, and with a suppressed laugh, as he thought of the absolute impossibility of Gravity's ever being anything *but* 'settled down') "of marrying. I often feel rather surprised that instead of cultivating the acquaintance of some nice young girl of a suitable age for you, you should always seek the society, by preference, of that excellent, but fat and elderly person, Mrs. Joggletilt. Now I——" but here Gravity coughed uneasily and broke in with—

"I don't care for young girls, my dear father. And Mrs. Joggletilt I really find a most companionable woman, and a gentle soul. She takes more interest in my mode of life than young girls could possibly be expected to do, and I find in her a most sympathetic friend."

The Duke's effort had failed again. There was no moving Gravity; he was so unlike most young men in his rank of life.

"When I was his age," murmured the Duke, closing his eyes rapturously and dropping his glass out—"By Jove! when I was his age!" and such beatific visions crossed the speaker's mind that the supply of plain prosaic language incontinently

failed him. He had 'gone the pace' in his youth, and few men living could give him points on the subject of racing, hunting, and his excellent taste in the due appreciation of the fairer part of creation. But, like the eminently sensible man he was, he had always used a nice discretion in all such matters, and so got as near the maximum of enjoyment, coupled with the minimum of harm, either to himself or others, as is, perhaps, humanly possible to poor weak, erring mortals. What he honestly could *not* understand, was how Gravity, his son, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, could possibly go on as he did, from year to year, 'existing like a cabbage,' as the Duke called it, and really seeming to like the process. How would he, his father, ever feel able to break the news to this grave and icy young man, that it was positively in contemplation to present him with a new, young, and pretty mamma? The Duke absolutely shuddered as he thought of it.

"He's a dear boy," said he to himself, thoughtfully adjusting his glass in his eye, and looking fixedly at his son. "A dear boy, but damme! you might shut him up in a harem, and he'd calmly sit down and read Horace to the inmates!!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RACE FOR THE DUKE'S CUP.

ON the eventful day of the Hunt Steeplechases, it seemed as though the whole countryside had gone mad. Billy Hooligan, the drunken ostler at the 'Duke of Haughtyshire's Arms,' struck work and said that he didn't care a naughty word what happened, but he'd be past participled if he'd miss one of the races. Jim Biggins, the one and only railway-station porter at Mudbury, swore that the passengers might get their luggage out themselves, as, come what might, he meant to be on the course and back his fancy; and even steady, jog-trot old Jorker, the farmer, said he was going to take a day off, and drive 'the missus' over in his cart. And these were but fair samples of the population at large, within the limits of the Duke's hunt. One and all, rich and poor, high and low, peer and peasant, joined in the cry, 'To the Course!'

The day was gloriously fine, and from a comparatively early hour a steady stream of people toiled up the side of the race-hill, on which an extemporised and roofless Grand Stand had been erected. A fenced-in space adjoining this, with a long, low shed, served as a saddling paddock, whilst on the opposite side of the course, another portion of the field was railed off as a reserved enclosure for carriages. One of the

first vehicles to arrive here was that conveying The Chase party; it was followed, at a brief interval, by the Catchem Court carriage, Miss Lucretia desiring to keep a strict eye on Travers's movements. Somehow or other, Lucretia had always entertained a vague sense of mistrust ever since that first sign of 'jibbing' exhibited by her swain ('swine,' Jack called him), and liked to keep him well up to the mark by being constantly at his side. She had made him a silk racing-jacket—green, a most appropriate colour, with big yellow spots on it, the size of an archery target—and this article, together with a silk jockey-cap, considerably too small for his fat—or more politely speaking, massive—head, reposed at that moment, in a brown leather kit-bag, at the bottom of the Binkie carriage.

Ronald, knowing perfectly well what was Travers's object in riding, had tried to persuade him to run his old horse in one of the smaller races; but with the persistence of a weak man, Mr. Binkie was deaf to all arguments and insisted upon entering the field for the big event of the day, the Duke of Haughtyshire's Cup, a prize presented each year by His Grace, who did this, as he did all things, well. The cup was something worth winning, and very different to the 'nominal value' silver-gilt atrocities so unblushingly offered at some meetings we wot of now. On this occasion, it took the form of a two-handled loving-cup, with wreaths of roses embossed on it, and a space, cunningly left by the silver-smith's art, for the name of the winning horse and owner to be engraved thereon. It was exhibited on its ebony pedestal in the front of the Grand Stand, and formed the cynosure of all eyes.

"I say," bleated Binkie, as he looked down the list of competitors' names on the card, "I don't think I shall win that cup, do you?" and he winked vacuously at Ronald, as if he thought he had said something funny.

"No; but 'you never know your luck.' Perhaps it'll come into the family in some other way," was the meaning answer.

Ten minutes before the first race was timed to start, the Duke drove across the course, and into the reserved enclosure, with a splendid team of browns. His Grace was an accomplished whip, and never appeared to better advantage than when driving a coach. Pulling up in a capital position, he lightly swung the thong of his whip round the stock in proper workman-like fashion, unbuckled his reins, and dropped them on to the wheelers' backs. Then he leisurely descended from the box seat and, after lighting a cigar, strolled across to the saddling paddock.

The Binkies had a luncheon-table behind their carriage, and this was being rapidly laid out with all kinds of dainties by the magnificent Mortimer and a small army of attendant satellites. Luncheon was not to be served until the first race was over, when both Ronald and his friend Prince Baboojee were to join them. Adela Comely, too, had promised Penelope to come, partly, it must be admitted, at Ronald's earnest instigation; he wanted to make things as pleasant as possible for the Binkies, in his own interests, and knew that Adela would be a safe 'draw' for the Duke.

The numbers went up for the first race, the Farmers' Plate, three miles, open to all horses belonging to those farming or owning not less than 100 acres within the country hunted

over by the Haughtyshire Hounds, no restriction as to riders. In this, Ronald was to ride No. 5, Mr. Oakfield's Chaplet, a great, raking, sixteen-hands mare, with an ugly fiddle-head, redeemed by a pair of the finest galloping and jumping shoulders in the world. There were seven starters in all; they cantered down, jumped the preliminary hurdles, pulled up, walked a little way back to where an important-looking functionary armed with a red flag awaited them; the flag fell, the bell rang, and they were off.

They passed the Stand and carriage enclosure in a cluster, but once over the first fence, Ronald sent his game, good-staying mare to the front, and for the next mile and a half held a strong lead, his mount fencing perfectly at everything. Then she began to come back to her horses, or more correctly speaking, they began to close in on her. She kept doggedly on, however, and it was only in the last half-mile that the spectators could see that, though she was a rare good 'un at the fences, she took a bit too long between them; and Thady O'Flynn, Cretan, and Burslem all raced past her into the straight, finishing in the order named. There was a great deal of public jubilation, for the winner was bred, owned, and ridden by a very popular young sporting farmer, and much good ale and other liquid refreshment was consumed on the strength of the victory. Ronald just slipped his feet into his over-shoes, a coat over his silken garb, and putting his whip in his pocket, trotted across to the Binkies' luncheon-table, where he found the few invited guests already preparing to 'do themselves well' over what looked like a very stiff tiffin course.

Amid the popping of champagne corks and the merry

laughter of those assembled on all sides of them, the luncheon proceeded gaily. Ronald, presiding at the cold chicken, thought he had never seen a prettier couple of girls than those standing opposite him, Adela and Penelope, his former and his present love. Which was the more beautiful of the two he wondered, feeling that he could thoroughly sympathise with the late Paris in his most embarrassing situation when called upon, somewhat unfairly, to award the Ribston. But these thoughts were quickly driven away by the incessant demand for chicken, which he was called upon to supply. Half-way through luncheon Mrs. Binkie's cup of happiness was indeed full, for no less a personage than the Duke himself sauntered by (wondering where the deuce Adela could have hidden herself), and catching sight of his fair one, raised his hat, and at once came up to speak with Mrs. Binkie. Sep, finding the honour quite too much for him, ignobly dodged round the other side of the carriage, on pretence of going for more champagne.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Binkie," exclaimed His Grace, in those light and airy tones which always gave the idea that the speaker was delighted to have found the person he was addressing, "Ah, my dear Mrs. Binkie, charmed to see you are patronising our local meeting. How do, Dennison? How do, Mistah—ah—ah——" and here he came to a full stop, as he failed to remember the face of the fat young gentleman staring at him from beneath the peak of a green silk racing cap, and holding on his fork, suspended in the air, an immense chunk of pigeon-pie.

"My son, Your Grace, Travers Binkie," put in Madam. "My son, that's just left Oxford," she said, with a touch of

pride in her voice. She considered that 'Oxford' must leave its impression even on a Duke.

"Oh, ah, yes. How do, Mr. Binkie? No, thank you very much, my dear lady, I won't take anything now. In fact, I am just going back to have luncheon. My dear Miss Comely, so glad to see you. I hope you'll allow me to fetch you to the coach for the principal race? that is, if your charming hostess will spare you?" and he turned such a fascinating smile upon Mrs. Binkie that that lady would have been prepared to go to the stake cheerfully, in the Ducal cause, had necessity called at that moment. The great man raised his hat, dropped his eyeglass, and passed on, and at the same time Travers gave up the hopeless struggle he had been engaged in with the pigeon-pie. For the fact was that, as the time for his race drew near, Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie began to experience a certain twittering of the heart, dryness of the lips, and the same disinclination for food that many of us feel when tossing on the troubled waters of the ocean. He began to doubt whether his horse *was* quite the certainty at his fences he had always thought; he began to doubt whether, after all, steeplechasing wasn't rather a reckless and foolish thing. In short, if it had not been for the fact that Miss Lucretia Lumpkin stood at his side, putting away prodigious chunks of pie and large quantities of salad, and ever and anon gazing into his boiled-codfish-like optics, Mr. Binkie would have run away!

Jack Dashwood and Sir Tommy were both going to ride, the former, one belonging to a dealer who had managed to 'qualify' him in that country, but which proud animal was really an old steeplechase horse with his name conveniently forgotten; and the Baronet, a brute owned by a farmer in



The Start for the Cup.

the neighbourhood. The latter animal had no chance at all, but Jack's mount was a better class horse than most of the starters, and although now getting into the 'sere and yellow,' was certainly to be labelled 'dangerous' in this field. His worthy owner, after a careful review of the rest of the competitors, and then a last glance at his own 'blood 'un,' muttered, "He can do this lot," and hurried away into the ring to back Sheldrake (as he was now called) for all he could get on. It wasn't much: the few 'bookies' on the course had come more prepared to do business with the yokel population, whose idea of 'dashing it down' only ran to taking 'a sovereign to a crown' or 'ten bob to a shillun' about a rank outsider. Still, the dealer managed to invest some twenty to twenty-five pounds, by dint of much industry and expenditure of shoe-leather, before the fourteen competitors slowly filed out of the saddling paddock.

Between the card and the number board, the following information might be gleaned as to the starters for the Duke of Haughtysire's Cup—

1 Sir Charles Payne's Vivandière.....	Mr. Lawson.
2 Mr. Barrett's Jackdaw	Owner.
3 Mr. Travers Binkie's Roman.....	Owner.
4 Mr. Norris's Erin's Pride.....	Sir T. Fitzsquander.
5 Mr. Mangold's Mimosa.....	Owner.
6 Mr. Ronald Dennison's Marmion.....	Owner.
7 Mr. Baxter's Thrush	Mr. Lowe.
8 Mr. Henry's Jill.....	Owner.
9 Lord Sandon's Dorothy.....	Mr. Lambton.
10 Mr. Gatwick's Sheldrake.....	Mr. Dashwood.
11 Mr. Brown's Cherry Ripe.....	Owner.
12 Mr. Herbert's Francis I.....	Mr. Oliver.
13 Mr. Ernest Shackle's The Monk.....	Owner.
14 Mr. Skinner's Fanatic.....	Mr. Jackson.

Penelope managed to get just a moment in which to say a word, privately, to Ronald.

“ Oh, Ronny, *do* be careful, for my sake, dear, won't you? I think I should die if anything dreadful happened to you. And if you *could* look after him ” (indicating the now palpably quaking ‘Trousers’ by a slight nod of her pretty head), “ I'm sure you will, won't you? *he is* such an ass ! ” she added, with a ring of real pathos in her voice.

“ All right, dearest. I don't think Travers's old horse knows how to fall; his only danger is in getting knocked over, but I think I know of a little scheme to prevent even that. Good-bye; wish me luck ! ” and he turned away and crossed the course, disappearing through the paddock gate, whilst the girl heaved a sigh and mentally resolved to put a stop to Master Ronny's steeplechase riding, when——

Ronald, giving a passing word to his groom, walked into the weighing shed, slipped off his coat and went to scale, taking the saddle from his man and dropping it on to his knees. The next to appear there was our friend Travers, now positively perspiring with fear. Instead of putting the cap over his ears, he had allowed those peculiarly prominent features to stick out in their usual fashion; his racing jacket was left loose, outside his breeches, looking like a very much shortened ballet dancer's skirt, and he had forgotten that riders weighed with their saddles, and had to send off for his, in hot haste. When it arrived, he put it on the scale and then tried to sit on it.

“ No, no, sir ! ” exclaimed the Clerk of the Scales, “ sit down yourself, and then take your saddle on to your knees; no, drop your whip, you don't weigh with that, you know. There, that's it. Twelve stone seven—right. Come on, sir, come on ! ” he added sharply, seeing that Binkie sat there staring, and without making any attempt to move. “ I've got

eight other riders to weigh, and time's nearly up already, as it is!"

"Oh, really!" began Binkie, when Ronald took him under the arm and hoisted him up bodily.



TRAVERS WEIGHS OUT.

"Oh, I say, you know, what ought I to do, you know, when you start? Won't there be rather a crowd, eh?"

"Now, look here, I'll tell you what to do. When we get to the starting-post, you get right behind the rest, and *keep* there,

down to the first fence. Then you won't get in anybody's way, and you won't get knocked over."

"Oh, really! but do you think there's any fear of getting—getting knocked over? It seems rather dangerous, you know, don't it?"

Ronald laughed drily.

"Steeplechase riding is not supposed to be the sport for infants and invalids, Binkie. But if you'll take my advice, I think you won't come to any harm."

Ronald walked away to the far side of the paddock, got a leg up on to Marmion—who looked quite the gentleman of the party, his chestnut coat shining like burnished copper—and walked him quietly over to the Stand side. Here he waited for the rest, just keeping his horse gently on the move. Binkie soon joined him, and a few minutes later the whole of the fourteen candidates were slowly filing out of the gate.

Lucretia put up her lorgnettes, and gazed long and fixedly at her future lord. With his cap tilted up on the crown of his head, his fat little round legs, and a considerable portion of his anatomy very insufficiently accommodated on the small seven-pound saddle, Binkie presented a somewhat curious spectacle.

The lady, after running him over from top to toe, dropped her glasses, and, turning with a severe, if not disdainful air to Mrs. Binkie, said—

"I don't think Travers is adapted for steeplechase riding; the—er—er—the dress, is both unbecoming and insufficient. Why don't they wear tail coats?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Binkie uncompromisingly, "the joint's too big for the dish, ain't it?"

Miss Lumpkin looked outraged, and muttered behind her race-card something about "vulgar old women," and just then the competitors turned to canter up, and jump the preliminary hurdles.

Ronald, finding that Marmion was rapidly getting excited, and in two minds whether to try a bolt or to savage the horse next to him, gave him his head and let him stride along quickly at the hurdles, over which he led the way with a jump which would have cleared a navigable river. Then away he went, as hard as he could lay legs to the ground, and for half a minute Ronald thought that the impetuous son of Capulet had got away with him in earnest. However, Ronny's frame and arms were muscled in a way calculated to stop any animal who possessed a mouth at all, and Marmion, bolter though he was, *had* a mouth—the only thing really wrong about him was that he became quite beside himself with excitement; so at the end of this impromptu gallop the good chestnut submitted to be stopped and slowly ridden down to the starting-post, sweating and lathering, and altogether looking rather as if he had been dragged through a pond. The gallop, however, had steadied him down a bit, and although he still yawed his head about, and took sundry snatches at the bridle, he was under complete control by the time the advance flag was hoisted.

The course was a very sporting one. Starting in the straight run-in, nearly opposite the enclosure and Stand, a gentle ascent of about two hundred yards led into a succession of small grass enclosures, pretty stiffly fenced by nature. At the end of these, and just as the course began to turn, left-handed, down the hill, came a somewhat formidable obstacle

composed of posts and rails, topped with gorse. This was succeeded by a long field of pasture, sloping down hill all the way to that abominable trap for the unwary, a 'regulation' ditch, a six-foot wide, clean cut, saw-pit looking grave, with a foot high rail on the take-off side, backed by an eighteen-inch thick, stiffly made up fence. From this point it was again all down hill to the brook, a fairly good sized running stream, with a low bushed-up fence in front of it. Turning again sharply left-handed, after the brook was crossed, the track led along the bottoms, always somewhat deep and holding, across three other fences, all fairly easy, and then commenced the journey for home. Half a mile before the goal was reached, the sinuous windings of the brook again necessitated a water-jump—this time without any fence on the take-off side; two artificial fences came next, and then another of the 'regulation' ditches. From this point there was a steady climb, barred only by two gorsed-up fences, before the winning-post was reached. Taken on the whole, it was a fairly severe line of country, quite big enough to test the jumping and galloping powers of the best hunter that ever ran. The distance for the Duke's Cup was about three miles and a half. And now, although the 'pencillers' had not mustered in any great numerical force, they managed to create a stupendous amount of noise, just in the last few moments before the start for the principal event. The ex-racehorse, Sheldrake, was a strong favourite, in consequence, chiefly, of his worthy owner's investments in the ring; and at the finish, nothing more than even money could be had about his chance, and not always that. Marmion was next in demand, but the healthy odds of five and six to one could always have been

had about him. Amid the clamorous cries of "The field a pony, a pony on the fee-ald!"—"Here, six to one bar one, six to one bar one, six to one bar-r-r one!"—"Eights Dorothy, ten to one the Roman!" (Binkie's horse, and so called on account of the animal's classic proboscis) "Even money Sheldrake," to be quickly succeeded by an offer of "I'll take odds!" the advance flag was suddenly dropped, the bell clanged out, and the whole multitude assembled seemed, at one and the same moment, to shout, "They're off!"

With a whirr and rush that makes the head swim for a moment, thirteen of the horses jump off in a confused cluster, crossing and jostling each other in an excitement to which most of them are quite unused. But whether horses are racing for the first time, or have grown old and cunning at the game, it seems to make little difference. They all appear to know of the struggle that is in store for them—almost of the dangers they will have to confront.

Perhaps, of this particular field of horses, Jack Dashwood was on the best, and Ronald Dennison on the worst behaved—to the former assertion we certainly make exception in favour of Mr. Travers Binkie's staid old Roman-nosed one, who got off well behind all the rest—to which position his owner's method of riding to hounds had, by this time, well accustomed him—and even then he discreetly forbore to hurry himself. Marmion had been dancing on his toes when the flag fell, and in the next moment would assuredly have whipped round and turned his tail where his head ought to be. Luckily, however, the signal was given just at the right time for him, and away he went like a shot out of a gun.

It was Ronald's purpose to let the horse go along in

front at first. It is always poor policy to let an impetuous horse exhaust his strength in fighting his jockey, when he might, perhaps, quiet down if allowed to go to the head of affairs. Dennison, too, was an admirable judge of pace, and knew just what to do with his horse. Dropping his hands low, he let him stride along up the gentle rise to the first fence, just before reaching which he glanced quickly over his shoulder to see where the rest of the field were. Then, speaking gently to the fretting, hard-pulling horse, he went at the obstacle and cleared it, but not in the collected way his backers would have liked to see, as the horse landed stiff-legged, after what looked more a like 'buck over' than a plain leap.

Ronald patted his neck, and again spoke to him, rather as if he really liked this awkward and highly dangerous way of negotiating a country, than otherwise; and to these quiet endearments the gallant chestnut presently paid heed. He ceased pulling at his rider, got his head comfortably down into its natural place, and hearing the thunder of the hoofs now close behind him, evidently made up his mind not to be caught if he could help it. Over the next four fences he held a lead of some half-dozen lengths, Jackdaw, Francis I., Jill, and The Monk following in a cluster, and taking their fences almost side by side, next; then came Jack Dashwood on Sheldrake, going pleasantly and evidently hardly out of a hand-gallop, followed at a couple of lengths' distance by Fanatic, Mimosa, and Dorothy; the rest, thus early in the race, beginning to tail off.

As soon as Travers had recovered from his surprise at seeing all the horses sprint off when the flag fell, he

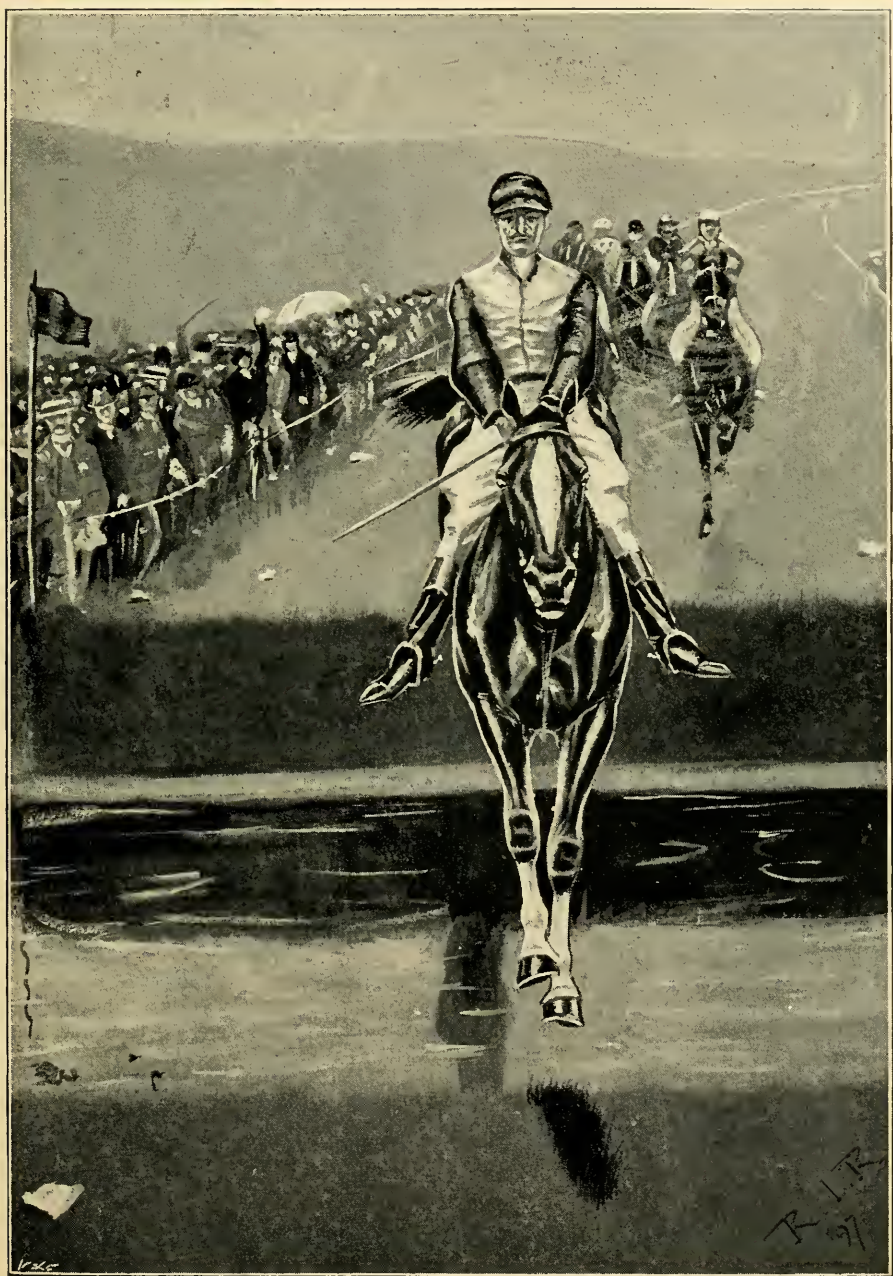
exclaimed, "Oh, really!" and at once proceeded to canter leisurely along to the first fence. Just as he jumped this, with a great deal of daylight showing between himself and the saddle, the majority of the field were crossing the second obstacle. If he had been on a Liverpool winner he would have been rather put to it to catch them up, after losing so much ground, and in justice to poor Travers, it must be admitted that he was not the only amateur who has been 'slipped.'

The writer still holds a painful remembrance of an occasion when he was riding one of his first races, and his mount was a 'certainty.' He felt too lordly to jump off with the rest, and therefore let them get well away before thinking it necessary to start; and then—then they were not to be caught quite so easily as he had reckoned on! Knowing that the animal's owner had the water-rates, and the family plate, and a few other trifles on his horse, he admits that the next few moments were rather unnerving. To be quite truthful, the perspiration poured off his august brow like water, with sheer horror! He sat down and rode like a demon, but only just got up in the last stride and won by a head. A subsequent interview with the owner was——well, the proceedings neither opened nor closed with prayer! But to return.

Binkie made no attempt to catch his horses—which attempt, even if made, would have been absolutely useless—but still cantered on, the green jacket and yellow spots blobbing up and down, half a mile behind the rest. He just managed to keep his seat over the fences by means of a hand surreptitiously placed on the fore part of his saddle, until the post and rails were reached.

“Oh, really!” squeaked Travers, his eyes starting out of his head with horror. “Oh, dear no, not if I know it! And did they really jump this beastly thing, I wonder? How silly of them. I shall go round.” And still sailing along at an easy canter, he avoided the fences, and cut across to the brook, where his adventurous career was effectually stayed—there was no way round that—and amid the jeers of the crowd standing at each side of it, he turned and walked his horse back to the Stand again.

Meanwhile, Ronald still held pride of place, his horse striding out and jumping beautifully. Having been allowed his own way in making running, he had not attempted his favourite trick of bolting, and was now giving his owner a comparatively pleasant ride. Over the posts and rails he led by at least a dozen lengths, and had no sooner landed than he was away again as quick as a rabbit, thus still further increasing his advantage. Jack Dashwood began to try the experiment of thinking two things at once—the first, that Ronald might possibly slip the lot of them if they didn’t look out; the second, that Marmion really *must* come back to his horses before long—and he found himself rather in the position of the gay young skater who tries to pass an advancing figure on both sides at once. He didn’t quite know whether to go on after his leader, or to wait hoping he would soon have enough of it. Finally he came to the conclusion that he would go past Jackdaw, Francis I., and Jill—The Monk had refused at the posts and rails—and thus get more within hail of the chestnut; this he did, and had managed to decrease Ronald’s lead to about eight lengths, just as he saw Marmion’s tail swish over the fence beyond the regulation ditch. The



Marmion leads at the Brook.

pace had now become a veritable 'cracker,' and the cocktail contingent were dropping rapidly astern.

Down the hill towards the brook, Ronald took another look round to see who was nearest him. Truth to tell, Dennison was not quite confident in his own mind about how his horse would tackle the water. It was not so much the obstacle itself, as the noisy crowd around it, that he feared Marmion might not like; and if he made any mistake at it, his rider had a natural and not ill-founded objection to being jumped on by the man behind him. He was somewhat reassured when he found that it was Jack Dashwood—who he knew to be a really good horseman.

"Look out for yourself, here, Dashwood!" he called out over his shoulder, and shouting in order to drown the noise of the thunder of the hoofs, and cries of the excited spectators. "I may come down at this!"

"Hope you will!" muttered Jack to himself, taking a judicious pull at his horse. "Believe I can do the rest of 'em, but I don't like the look of *you*!" Directly Marmion catches sight of the gleaming water of the brook, and has his ears saluted by the deafening shouts of the crowd, he begins to 'go in the breeching,' screwing himself spirally, and, vulgarly speaking, trying to 'cut it.' Ronny sits still as a mouse, not moving hand or foot; then, just as they race down between the two living lines of shrieking humanity, the wicked impulse seems to pass from the horse; he catches hold of his bit again and, springing into the air, clears the obstacle in magnificent fashion, amid a chorus of ringing cheers.

Ronny flushes a deep red of gratified pleasure, as he stoops forward and pats the now foam-flecked neck. Jack follows

over in safety ; then Francis I. just in front of Jill and Jackdaw side by side, with Dorothy next ; Mimosa jumps short, comes an awful ‘ purler,’ and is almost rolled upon whilst in the brook by The Monk, who has been got over the fence he refused, and the subsequent ones up to this point, by his plucky owner ; nothing else is within a hundred yards, except an old black hunter, whose rider is mercilessly chaffed by the crowd, as he lobs over the water.

“Yah ! you should a-started him over-night ! Go on guv’nor ! you’ll win yet, if all the rest of ’em falls down !” “Looks lonely without the shafts, don’t ’e, Bill ?” and so on.

Ronald’s primrose jacket and violet sleeves can be plainly seen from the Stand, still leading the way, Jack’s chocolate and blue lying handy, about three lengths off. Then, at a somewhat longer interval, come Jill and Dorothy, Jackdaw and Francis I., the last-named, however, beginning to hold out signals of distress, his rider’s arms going like the sails of a windmill. The horse drops farther and farther astern, and at the succeeding open ditch he comes down, rolling over his jockey in what looks to be a very uncomfortable way. There is the usual rush of people to the spot ; a mounted policeman gallops up, and seeing the rider lying quite still and evidently senseless, on the ground, waves his handkerchief as a signal for the ambulance to come from the Stand.

And now the survivors of the struggle begin to close up, as they turn for home. Dorothy, hard driven, passes the pair she has been in company with throughout, and gains rapidly on Sheldrake, joining him at the foot of the hill ; these two, together with Jill, then gradually, but surely, close up with Marmion. The latter still leads, but Sheldrake’s



At the last Fence.

head is at his girths now, and Jack and Ronald are watching each other like cats after mice. Jumping the third fence from home, the proverbial 'sheet' would have covered Marmion, Sheldrake, Jill, Dorothy, and Jackdaw; the five race closely together to the next obstacle, over which Sheldrake leads, Marmion landing but a bare half-length behind him, and almost simultaneously with Dorothy; but the last couple, hugging each other a bit too closely, both come down, the mare falling first, and Jackdaw landing on top of her, a great shout going up from the Stand, to announce what has happened; then ensues the final set-to, as the three survivors sweep along towards the last fence, each rider putting as much pressure on as he dares. Dorothy's rider is the first to pick up his whip, and for a brief moment it suffices to keep her in her place alongside the other two. Only for a moment, however, and then she drops out of it, a beaten horse.

"Sheldrake wins!" "Marmion, Marmion!" "The chestnut does it!" "The bay wins!" A very Babel of shouts salutes the ears of the two riders as they come, almost abreast, at the last fence. Ronny begins to feel that the ex-flatracer has the foot of him—and a very bitter feeling it is, so greatly has he set his heart upon winning this race—then, as he sees Jack, with the triumph dawning in his face, take a slight steadier at his horse, he mutters to himself, "I'll chance it!" and rides the gallant chestnut home as though the final fence was not there at all.

A dangerous experiment, Ronald Dennison, a dangerous experiment—and more than one human life has been sacrificed in trying it—but it answers all right to-day. Sheldrake jumps at the same moment that, with his head loose, and

urged on by voice, hand, and heel, Marmion dashes partly over and partly through the obstacle, gaining a clear half-length by the expedient.

“The chestnut wins, the chestnut for a pony!” “Marmion walks in!!” roars the excited crowd, as the two gallant horses again close in a desperate struggle for victory. For a brief moment the issue is in doubt. But that last risky move of Ronald’s has settled the question; the half-length lost by Sheldrake can never be quite regained, and Marmion passes the post amid the deafening shouts of the crowd, a winner by a neck, the dealer’s horse just failing in his effort to ‘get up.’ The scene of enthusiasm is indescribable, for added to the hearty acclamations of all Ronald’s friends—and they are legion—are the delighted shouts of the bookmakers at the defeat of the ‘readied’ candidate; and amidst a sea of radiant faces, Ronald rides his gallant chestnut quietly back through the excited throng, and into the saddling paddock.





Marmion returning to weigh.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT CUPID'S SHRINE.

“WELL,” exclaimed the Duke to Miss Comely, seated beside him on the box of his coach, “I never wish to see a better finish for a race than that—nor better riding either,” he added. “They say ‘the end justifies the means,’ but certainly the way Ronald chanced that last fence was a sight calculated to make one’s hair stand on end. It won him his race, though.”

Adela was a little pale. Although no longer in that state which we describe as being ‘in love’ with Ronald, she was yet very fond of him as a friend, and his reckless act had given her a bad fright. However, the danger was over now, and all was well. The colour began to return to her cheeks, and she was able, in answer to the Duke, to make some light reply.

“You permit me to light a cigar, my dear Miss Comely? Thanks. Ah, I really must be getting an old man now; it is—er—ah—’m—well, a very long time ago now, since I rode my last steeplechase. I remember it, though, as if it were yesterday. It was in the Vale of Aylesbury, and I won on Mameluke. Jolly days those were, to be sure, *and* the fun we used to have after the dinner at the—— Ah, well, never mind, I won’t bore you with ‘man’ stories.”

"But I should not be bored. On the contrary, I should be immensely interested. Do tell me," said Adela coaxingly.

"Well, it was merely this. Meredith, a man I knew in the Guards, had a horse which he greatly fancied both as a jumper and galloper. He had entered him for the big steeplechase at Aylesbury, and backed him for a great deal more than he could afford to lose. After a rattling race, I was lucky enough to win on Mameluke, a horse I had bought two months beforehand. Poor Meredith was very hard hit, losing about five thousand in all, but that night he was the gayest of the gay. Only to me did he tell the depth of his misfortune; he would have to leave the Service, and intended to enlist in a French chasseur regiment, then in North Africa. We dined in the old Rochester Room of the White Hart, at Aylesbury, and after dinner the fun grew fast and furious. Jameson, the 'Leviathan' bookmaker, was present with us, and, having made a tremendous pile on the race that day, was in very high spirits, and commenced some rather rough badinage at the expense of Meredith and his defeated horse. 'He can neither gallop or jump,' cried Jameson scoffingly. 'Come, Jameson, that's too severe,' said Meredith, 'there is no cleverer jumper in the world, however badly he failed to gallop the course to-day.' 'Ha, ha!' laughed the bookmaker, 'then jump him over this dining-table!' Meredith coolly replied, 'Dare you bet in earnest against it?' Jameson at once drew out his betting book, and said, 'To any amount you choose to go.' Well, to cut the story short, the horse was actually brought up the stairs into the room, a young fellow named Manning, a light weight and a perfect horseman, mounted him bareback, and with only a halter on the

horse cleared the table easily.* The bookmaker had been laying the contemptuous odds of fifty to one against the possibility of the horse succeeding, and the money Meredith won over it was sufficient to set him on his feet again, and he continued in the Service until last year, when he retired as a General and a K.C.B. That's the incident I was thinking of when I spoke, Miss Comely. Er—by the way, have you seen Gravity about anywhere?"

"Not lately, Duke," replied Adela, taking a comprehensive look round. Adela felt that she had no use for Gravity at that moment, and hoped he'd keep away. "He was feeding Mrs. Joggletilt, in his Good Samaritan fashion, the last time I saw him."

"Oh," said His Grace, evidently relieved at the absence of his attentive son's supervision. "And now we'll settle our commercial transactions. Let me see, you backed Marmion with me for half-a-dozen pairs of gloves—six and a quarter? Before to-morrow night, I hope that my debt of honour will have been discharged. And now, my dear Miss Comely, I want to say something to you which I have been on the point of saying——"

"How do, Duke," called a voice from below. It was that of Major Carrington, a member of the Haughtyshire Hunt.

"Ah, how-de-do, how-de-do—d—n you!" (*sotto voce*) replied the Duke, fixing his glass in his eye to stare at the new comer. Then, letting the monocle fall again, he resumed—

* The main incident—the leap over the dining-table—took place in the Rochester Room of the hotel mentioned in 1851, and Manning was the name of the rider.

“—a thing which I have been on the point of saying for a long time past.” His Grace coughed, and Adela longed to know whether she was looking at her best or not.

The Duke edged himself a little nearer on the box-seat to Adela, and then resumed speaking—

“My son Gravity, who is the best, the very best of good fellows, and of whom I am fonder than of anyone—that is, of *almost* anyone, on earth, entertains curious ideas on the subject of marriage—er—that is, I should say, curious ideas on the subject of *my* marriage, and—er—well, it has made my path rather a thorny one, whenever—er—I mean——” (He was just slipping out “whenever I saw a pretty woman,” but fortunately checked himself in time.) “I should say, that that consideration—er—Gravity’s peculiar views on marriage, you know—has hitherto acted as somewhat of a hindrance to me in the choice of a second wife. But dearly as I love him, I feel that if the matter were put plainly before——”

“That was a real rippin’ race for the cup, wasn’t it, Dook, eh?” drawled the voice of Captain Flaubert Fitz-Ass, of the Royal Fire Guards Blue, from the ground just below the box-seat.

“It was, it was—er—d—n you!” (*sotto voce*). “I never saw a greater ass—a greater race, I mean.”

“Yes, and the way they came over that last fence, too; well, I felt all over like——”

“Ah, you want a glass of champagne, I’m sure,” interrupted His Grace hastily. “Now do go round to the table, just at the back of the coach, and you’ll find everything there. Tell Parker—you’ll find him somewhere about,” and the bore

drifted vaguely away in quest of the sparkling fluid, whilst the Duke once more turned to his fair companion.

“These—er—interruptions are slightly annoying when one has something of particular interest to say. However, to resume : I was about to say—that—well, not to beat about the bush, will you, my dear Miss Comely—my dear Adela—honour me by becoming my wife?”

And what Adela said in reply, may be left to the polite discrimination of the reader.

Directly the last race was over a general stampede of ‘Horse, Foot, and Artillery’ took place from the course. The Duke’s four were quickly put to, and His Grace, with an elegant twirl of his long whip-thong round the stock, chirruped to his team, and away they went, the leaders cantering and putting in the ornamental, whilst the sturdy wheelers did the useful portion of the work. Quickly following them came the Binkies’ carriage; these two were almost the first to leave the course. Then came a crowd of vehicles all together, followed naturally by the inevitable block, and the equally inevitable *mélange* of bad language and policemen. Leaving the ‘block’ to arrange itself as best it can, those present bid each other farewell and we hear a few of the parting words—

“Then I shall call upon Lady Comely to-morrow afternoon.”

“Good-night, dear Ronny. I *am* so proud that you’ve won the Cup to-day. But I shall *never* let you ride in one of these dreadful steeplechases again after we are——”

“I say, you know, if I hadn’t sold the winner, why, you know, I should have won the Cup to-day, shouldn’t I?”

“No, you silly cuckoo! The rest of the horses would have

been over the first three fences while you were thinking about starting!"

"Good-bye, and don't you forget my gloves!"

"Jolly day it's been. Awfully glad old Ronald's won the Cup."

"Good-night, Travers. I hope this is the last time you'll attempt steeplechase riding. Really, I can't help saying that I think you made yourself perfectly ridiculous in that absurd dress!"

"Oh, really!" etc., etc.

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There was no house-party at the Castle, and the Duke and his son, after dining together, adjourned to the former's sanctum. Gravity did not smoke—it made him feel ill—and the fact of his accompanying his revered parent to the smoking-room, instead of joining him there at a later hour, as was his custom, filled the Ducal 'guilty conscience' with alarm.

"Wonder if he guesses anything? H'm, well, he's *got* to know all about it, so here goes." But His Grace took care to get his cigar well alight before taking the plunge. It is really astonishing what an amount of confidence smoking gives a man. After the first six whiffs the Duke felt strengthened for the coming ordeal; comforted, but still decidedly ill at ease.

"Er—I have something which——" began father and son simultaneously—then they both came to an abrupt stop.

"I beg pardon, dear boy, you were about to say——"

"I?—oh no; what I have to say will keep. You go on, sir; you were going to say——"

“Well—er—you see, my dear fellow—er—I—I was going to—to make a somewhat important communication to you—to inform you, in short, of—of—an impending change which—which may—I only say *may*—make—er—some difference to you in your mode of life.”

“And so was I, sir!”

“The devil you were!” exclaimed his astonished sire. “You—you don’t mean that *you’re* going to get married?”

“That is exactly what I do mean, sir. I—I thank you for enabling me to get it out. I had thought that I should have entirely failed to do so,” he gasped. “I didn’t know how you’d take it.”

The Duke heaved a mighty sigh of relief as he strode over, and warmly grasped his son’s hand.

“My dear boy, I congratulate you with all my heart. And the fact is, I’m going to be married myself, so nothing could be more opportune. I proposed to-day on the top of the coach.”

“And I proposed to-day inside it.”

The two men stared at one another for a moment, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

“Of course Miss Comely is to be the future Duchess?”

The Duke nodded gaily.

“And the coming Lady Gravity?”

“Is Mrs. Joggletilt.”

If the Honourable Seraphina Joggletilt was not quite the Duke’s idea of a fitting daughter-in-law, she was still an unimpeachably good match; for the excellent Joggletilt, who some four years before had left this sphere for another, and, we trust, a brighter one, had shed, in departing, the comfortable

sum of five hundred thousand pounds, which said sum would, His Grace thought, be of infinite service in renovating the somewhat shattered fortunes of the Lords of Haughtyshire.

“I shall, if you wish it, sir, still continue to manage the estate,” said Lord Gravity. “It is part of my life now, and I should not like to give it up.”

“Thanks, dear boy, a thousand thanks. I don’t know what on earth I should do without you. Now, I should like to make you a very handsome wedding present, and——” but the Duke stopped short as he noticed the old action of his son’s hands stealing into his trousers pockets, and the old, half-negative shake of the head.

“I’m very sorry, father, but I can’t, I really *can’t* spare you money enough for anything of that sort. The estate won’t stand it. You see, there’ll be the whole of the Broughton farm to——”

“Oh, d—n the details,” broke in the Duke hastily. “But, by Jove! if I have to sell my horses, you *shall* have a wedding present, and a thumping good one, my boy.”

And thus was settled what, under other and less favourable circumstances, might have been a cause of terrible trouble between these two. On the day following, the fact that there would soon be a double wedding, and that the Castle would supply the two ‘grooms,’ became public property.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNOVER & BINKIE.

ALTHOUGH Jack Dashwood had missed the big event with Sheldrake, he had managed to win about twenty pounds when he pulled off the last race of the day, and as Sir Tommy also had backed the horse—strictly ‘on the nod’ with a confiding bookmaker—they were both in excellent spirits as they drove back to The Chase. Penelope also was more than delighted because of Ronald’s win. But with these exceptions, there was a certain gloom and dulness over the rest of the party. Septimus was extremely sleepy, and bored to death at being made to witness a sport for which he did not care twopence; Mrs. Septimus was trying to quell a growing dislike for the Lumpkins, whose conduct had again been haughty and what she described as top-loftical. “I begin to hate that stuck-up minx, and think that even my fool of a son” (Mrs. Binkie never minced matters with regard to poor Travers) “is a sight too good for her. Who’s she, I should like to know, to give herself such airs? and what if the Binkie money was made in ‘Composites’? They was *good* Composites, anyhow!”

And that ‘fool of a son’ himself was divided between satisfaction at the thought that he would ever thereafter be able to ‘gas’ to his female acquaintance that he had ridden in a steeplechase, and vexation that his Luty had not been

at all impressed by the performance ; in fact, that she had delivered herself of one or two most unpleasant remarks upon the subject. He had not appeared as a hero to her, at all ; and this was a very annoying circumstance for Mr. Binkie, who, as we have said, rode entirely for the sake of the glory attaching to the wearing of racing colours—and that gentleman enjoyed no monopoly of the idea, as most people who know anything of racing matters could testify.

“I really don’t think Luty quite appreciates me as she ought. And it’s so doosid funny, too, ’cause I’m sure she worshipped me when I stayed at Catchem Court—before I asked her to marry me !”

Ah, friend Travers ! isn’t that often the way of the world ? It fawns upon you as long as its desires are left unfulfilled—but the moment you grant the favour, whatever it may be, that it wishes, away goes the deprecating manner, the air of implied deference, the spurious affection. And the lower the social grade of the would-be recipient of your favour, the more certain you may be of his ingratitude. ‘Set a beggar on horseback——’ and we all know the rest of the saying. Although the last words of the argument do not apply to this particular case, it was nevertheless a fact, that having received Travers’s offer, the fair Luty did not deem it at all necessary to keep up any show of affection for her victim, and Mr. Binkie was just beginning to open his codfish-like eyes to the truth.

“Now, Tottie”—and here he heaved a deep sigh, like the noise emitted by a blast furnace—“Now, Tottie always did appreciate me ; but she’s cut up rough, and it’s really awfully beastly, you know, altogether,” said our friend to himself ruefully.

The following morning, amidst the batch of letters for the inmates of The Chase, was one in a blue envelope, addressed to Travers. It read as follows—

“25, GRAZEIN FIELDS,

“*March 25th.*

“DEAR SIR,

“Yourself *ats.* Turnover.

“This case is down in the paper for hearing, and will probably be reached somewhere about next Wednesday week. We have, according to your instructions, briefed Mr. Ronald Dennison for the defence. We will write or telegraph you exact date of the case coming on, as soon as it is in the daily cause list.

“We are, dear sir,

“Yours faithfully,

“CLUTCHCOSTS & MAKEABIT.

“T. A. Binkie, Esq.”

“Oh, really!” murmured Binkie, “so she does mean to bring the action after all! I thought she’d forgotten it, perhaps. And now I suppose the lawyer chappies will ask me a lot of beastly questions which I don’t know the answer to. Well, if they give a verdict against me, Pa’ll have to pay the damages. Won’t he swear!”

And a week later, upon receipt of a further intimation from Messrs. Clutchcosts & Makeabit, Travers left The Chase for town, accompanied by his friend and Counsel, Mr. Ronald Dennison. The two took up their quarters at a quiet hotel in the neighbourhood of the new Law Courts, and there prepared for battle with those particular minions of the law who were engaged to represent the interests of Miss Tottie Turnover.

Ronald, a bit rusty for want of practice—he had not held a brief for three or four years past—spent the day or two preceding that on which the trial was to take place, in brushing up his law at the Middle Temple Library and in picking up all he could in the Courts themselves. Travers amused himself by sauntering about the streets, looking in at the shop windows, and buying several articles for which he had no earthly use, with an occasional run in to Tattersall's and Aldridge's on the sale days. Each night he went to some Music Hall, 'seeing life,' as he called it.

That curious expression 'seeing life'—what absurd vagaries it is held to excuse, and what weird ideas of its interpretation some men have! To the Travers type, the average 'Variety Stage' performer's doings represent 'life,' whilst quite a large number are in the regular habit of what they call 'seeing life' through the bottom of a whisky-tumbler!

At length the eventful day, which was to witness the forensic combat between the forces of the Turnovers and the Binkies, arrived. Trousers lost himself five times between the entrance to the Great Hall and Court 7, where Mr. Justice Smotherum would sit at half-past ten of the clock, in order to try the important issue raised by Miss Tottie Turnover's case. Finally, he gave himself into the custody of one of the attendants, and was, by him, conducted to the door of the Court and dexterously shot inside. He took a seat in the row reserved for Q.C.'s; and thence, being promptly fired out by the usher, he drifted into the 'well,' and was charitably taken charge of by Mr. Clutchcosts, who dumped him down in a place at his side.

A moment later, and the fair plaintiff, arrayed in a tartan

plaid gown of such a description as would represent Joseph in his coat of many colours at about 9 st. 7 lbs., entered the Court on the arm of her solicitor, Mr. Poky-Snowsin. She was closely followed by 'Ma' Turnover, carrying a crimson velvet reticule, which contained a salts bottle, several clean pocket handkerchiefs for weeping purposes, a brandy flask, and the family luncheon. The ladies also took their places in the 'well' only a few feet, in fact, away from 'Halgy.'

"Smoothe Silky Q.C., is against us, Mr. Dennison!" murmured Mr. Clutchcosts to his Counsel. "He's a very oily gentleman, and most polite; but he's dangerous, sir, very dangerous, with a jury. You'll have to watch him, sir, you'll have to watch him!" and the (more or less) worthy lawyer shook his head profoundly, and then nodded in the direction of the 'dangerous' man, with more than Burleigh-like profundity.

"I'm glad to hear he's not one of the bullying sort," returned Ronald simply. "In my rather undisciplined condition, I might possibly punch his head if he were rude!"

Mr. Clutchcosts looked shocked: violence, contempt of court, writ, attachment, Holloway Gaol, application, purge contempt, release, payment of costs; all these he rolled through his brain, the while he maintained the grieved expression on his countenance. The next moment the curtains around the dais door were violently agitated; an usher with a white face and thin scarlet hair strutted in, and called in loud tones—

"Silence, please!" and his Lordship waddled in. He made a bob at the Bar, the Bar bobbed back at him; then everyone subsided into his seat, and the Registrar called out in a dry, ministerial voice—

"Turnover against Binkie." Whereat much shuffling of feet, muttering and mumbling, in the midst of which the learned Judge looked up angrily and cried—

"Silence, please!"

Whereupon the Registrar rose from his seat, glared all round the Court, and repeated—

"Silence, please!"

And the usher, awakened to a sense of the awful responsibility incurred by any who should dare to speak in the august presence of Mr. Justice Smotherum, bawled out at the top of his voice—

"Si-lence, please!"

And then the Junior Counsel for the plaintiff, Mr. Clifford Sinn, hastily swallowing a cough-drop, rose on his hind legs and stumbled through some legal jargon, yeleft 'pleadings,' after which the real business of the day began, as Mr. Silky's honeyed accents invited the attention of the twelve 'good men and true,' whilst he narrated the details and particulars of one of the most heartless cases of a young man's frailty, and a young man's desertion, which it had yet been his lot to hear of.

"Oh, but that's rather beastly, you know, isn't it?" squeaked Mr. Binkie to his solicitor. Poor Travers had certainly never viewed his own conduct in any such light as this before, and was disagreeably surprised at hearing himself thus denounced. Mr. Clutchcosts turned to his client, and in soothing tones said—

"It's only Silky's way. He says the same thing in every 'breach' case he has. The judges all know him, and it's a fresh jury every time, you see, so they don't have the chance of getting sick of the statement."

“ Oh, really ! then he doesn't actually mean it, eh ? ”

“ 'Sh, -h'sh,' ” whispered Mr. Clutchcosts, and Binkie subsided into silence as the mellifluous tones went evenly on, detailing much of what Travers had said, and a great deal more that he had never even thought of, and after introducing the subject of the defendant's last letter to his client, the great Q.C., with something of a triumphant flourish, produced that precious document, adducing it as evidence, clear and decisive, that the story told by the fair plaintiff was true, whilst that relied on for the defence was one which, when submitted to such intelligent brains as those pertaining to the jurymen he saw before him, would not, he contended, hold water for one moment. “ In that letter,” proceeded Mr. Smoothe Silky, waving it airily about in his hand, as he bent forward to address the jury still more confidently, “ what do we find ? Do we discover any repudiation of what my client alleged, namely, that Mr. Binkie had promised to make her his wife ? No ! There is an attempt, it is true, to explain away——”

“ I don't want to interrupt my learned friend unnecessarily,” said Ronald, rising at this juncture, “ but I must ask him to read the whole of the letter, if he is going to comment on it at this stage.”

“ Oh, certainly, certainly ; *we* have nothing to conceal ! ” replied the great Queen's Counsel with a majestic air, and he then read through the whole of Travers's somewhat unfortunate screed, written in reply to Miss Turnover's threat of an action. “ And, gentlemen, I beg to draw your special attention to the very last paragraph of this precious effusion. Let me read these words to you again—‘ I might marry you some day or other, who knows ?—that is, if you don't put the matter into

a beastly lawyer's hands, because they are interfering people who I don't like.' "

Smoothe Silky paused, in order to allow the words he had just read to settle duly down into the jury's minds. Then glancing round the Court, his eyes fell upon Travers's round, stupid face, and half-opened mouth, and resuming his address, he said—

"The man who wrote those words was no innocent, gentlemen. The man who penned that paragraph was clever—diabolically clever, and gifted with an ingenuity and craft, a subtle brain" (by this time poor Trousers's eyes were starting out of his head with amazement), "which, had it been applied to a nobler purpose, might have won him name and fame in the world. But he has chosen a baser use for his genius; he has applied it to the deceiving of a young and artless girl, and she comes before you to-day, clothed in innocence, and—and——"

"——the usual feminine attire!" whispered Ronald to the brother barrister on his right.

"——and demanding at your hands that solatium, those damages, which, whilst not vindictive, should yet be substantial, bearing in mind that my client is poor, and that the defendant is a man whose reputation for wealth it would be mere affectation on my part to suppose you are ignorant of. And you must also remember the loss she sustains in not obtaining so clever, so able, so witty and intellectual a companion for life, as Mr. Travers Binkie." And with this peroration, Mr. Silky resumed his seat, leaving Travers absolutely at a loss to know whether he had been blessed or cursed the most.

Mr. Clifford Sinn then proceeded to call Miss Tottie

Turnover, who stepped briskly into the witness-box, and proceeded to remove her right-hand glove, preparatory to being sworn.

“Not quite so jaunty in your bearing, my dear Miss Turnover, please,” whispered her solicitor in her ear. “And it might be useful to us if you would arrange to weep, in, say, about ten minutes to a quarter of an hour’s time,” he added.

Mr. Poky-Snowsin then crept silently back to his seat in the well of the Court, and the fair Tottie proceeded to give her evidence in chief, fully corroborating all that her eloquent and learned Counsel had said already in his opening statement to the jury. Then Mr. Clifford Sinn, having gently subsided into his seat again, Mr. Ronald Dennison rose to have his turn, and the whole of the audience settled themselves down to listen to the cross-examination.

After a few unimportant preliminary ‘feelers,’ Ronald said, in an indifferent voice—

“By the way, Miss Turnover, your learned Counsel has spoken of you as a young girl. I know what odium I shall incur in putting this question, but it is one which I am bound, in the interests of the defendant, to ask. I must ask you what is your age?”

“Really, my Lord,” began Mr. Silky, “what has this to do with the case? I must——”

But here Mr. Justice Smotherum, who wanted to know himself, promptly overruled the objection, and ordered the witness to answer the question.

Tottie tossed her head disdainfully, and then said—

“I’m just twen——”

“One moment,” interrupted Ronald. “It’s only fair to you,

Miss Turnover, to say that I have certain evidence in my possession here, in relation to the matter."

Tottie 'tumbled,' and immediately changed front. "I'm thirty-two," she said sullenly.

"Ah; and so, when my learned friend was referring to you as a young girl deceived and abandoned by a heartless man—my client—he was, as a fact, speaking of the love affairs of a lady of thirty-two and a young man of twenty-four, eh?"

"How can the plaintiff say what Mr. Binkie's age is?" protested Mr. Silky energetically.

"I am putting it to her now," replied Ronald calmly, "and I will formally prove the defendant's age, if you wish it."

Mr. Silky simmered down again, as Mr. Justice Smotherum dipped the wrong end of his pen into the ink, and wrote down nothing with the nib.

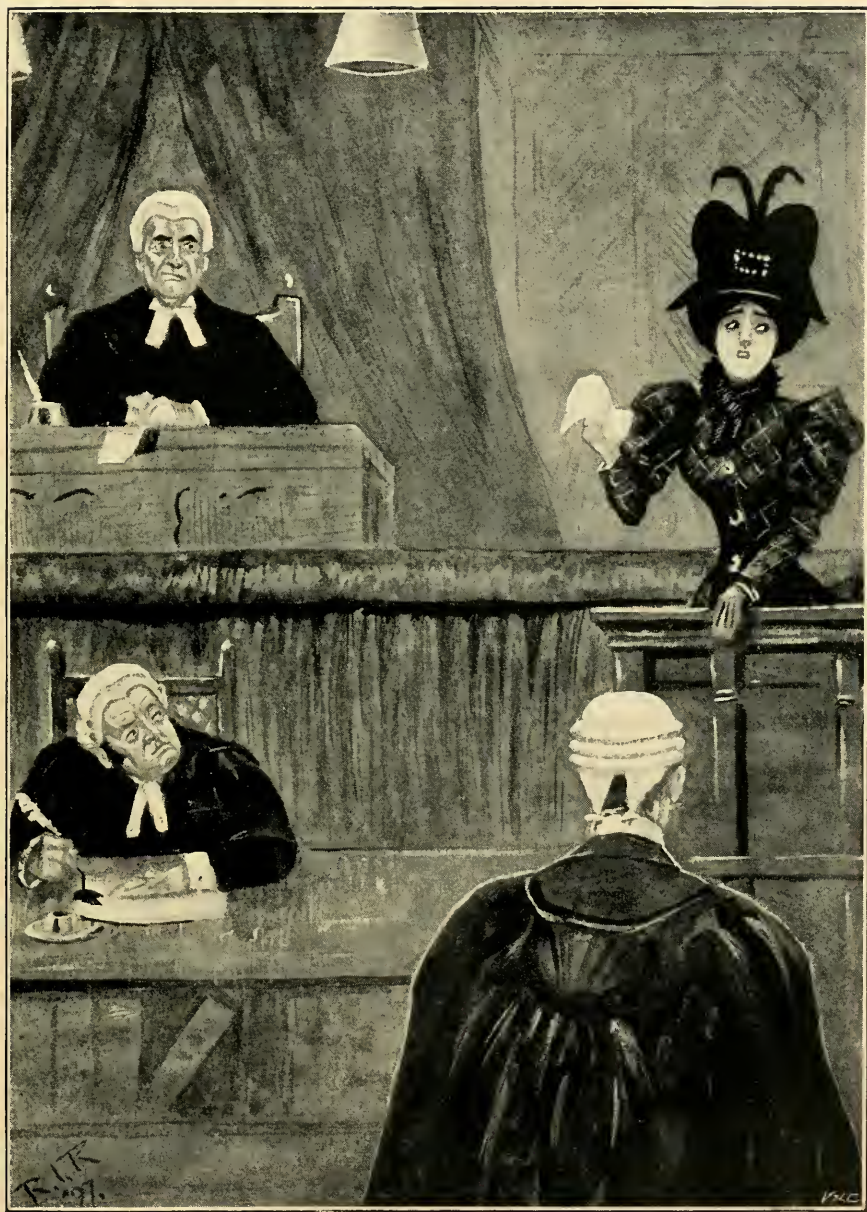
"Can you produce any letters—other than those you have already shown us—which passed between you and the defendant?" asked Ronald.

"Oh, Halgy never was one for doing much writing," answered the lady promptly. Mr. Justice Smotherum tickled his red nose with the inky end of his pen, thereby producing a pleasing, if wholly unexpected, effect.

"*Rouge et Noir*," murmured a flippant Junior, fixing his glass into his eye, in order the better to survey his Lordship.

"Then, I may take it from you, Miss Turnover, may I, that no such letters exist?"

"Oh no, we had very little letter-writing," replied the fair



Tottie in the Box.

plaintiff, with a toss of her head. "We used to see each other too often for that!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Ronald quickly, "how often?—about, you know?"

"Well, p'raps three or four times a week."

"Oh, really! what a whacker!" bleated Binkie, in perfectly audible tones.

"Si—lence!" roared the usher, as a titter ran through the Court.

"Will you undertake to swear that you have ever in your life seen the defendant four times in any one week?" continued Ronald relentlessly.

Miss Turnover didn't like this. Had she not been on her oath (and therefore punishable for perjury) she would have lied glibly enough; but Mr. Poky-Snowsin had given her a quiet hint on this subject, and the lady had been inspired with a holy horror of the dock. Remembering her solicitor's parting advice as she had stepped into the witness-box, she now, instead of answering the question, tried to pump up some tears.

"Halgy would never have so insulted a laidy!" she gasped, between her sobs.

"I think perhaps this would be a favourable opportunity to adjourn for luncheon," observed Mr. Justice Smotherum, who always hated to be bored with tears. "At least," he added hastily, as his clerk whispered something in his ear, "at least—er—that is——"

"Yes, my Lord, he's opened two dozen already—on the deep shell, my Lord," softly purred the clerk.

"Er—I was just considering the convenience of Counsel,

and—er—I may say ” (another whispered conference with the clerk, in which the words “ not Chablis, but a small bottle of Guinness ” were heard distinctly in Court). “ I may say that—er—I think we will adjourn now,” he concluded, turning from his clerk, and again addressing the Court at large. His Lordship then rose, smacked his lips at the thought of the luscious Whitstables and the rich brown stout awaiting him, and quickly waddled off through the curtained doorway.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VERDICT—WEDDING BELLS.

WHILST the learned Judge discussed his natives, the equally learned Counsel wrestled with the antediluvian bun and the pre-historic sandwich. It has been said, and truly, that England, more than any other country, rewards her sons liberally for valour, but why, oh, why, is there no Cross, no medal, for the man who boldly pits his digestive organs against the evil forces arrayed in their might, on the everyday refreshment counter? The railway-station sandwich, and the insidious Bath bun can claim their victims just as certainly as battle and plague; and 'a good man struggling with adversity' is surely never better exemplified to our eyes than when we see a friend libating lemonade or worrying a sausage roll.

At a little past two o'clock, his Lordship, full of energy and Whitstables, came back into Court, and the cross-examination of the plaintiff by Mr. Ronald Dennison was resumed. Things ruled quiet for a time, but then Counsel for the defence put in some nasty shots which not only reduced the fair lady once more to tears, but also succeeded in making Mr. Silky look extremely uncomfortable for the ultimate issue of his case.

Sir Tommy and Jack Dashwood had come up expressly for the fun of seeing their dear friend Binkie well trounced, and

to get as much fun out of the whole performance as possible. At one of Ronald's questions, Jack observed to Tommy—"That's a rum one for the lady to explain away. I fancy it'll make old Silky 'sit up and purr.'" But at that moment Mr. Binkie rose, and, in an agitated whisper to his Counsel, begged that gentleman not to press his question.

Ronald looked somewhat astonished.

"But, my dear fellow, I must ask these questions, if we are to succeed. And I don't think the other side fancy their case very much now. We shall win, but you really must let me take my own course, you know."

"But you—oh, really! you know, it's so doosid beastly, you know, to ask such rude questions, you know!"

"Shut up, Trousers; don't you see he's doing his best for you, you owl!" politely remarked Jack, and poor Travers, almost in tears, subsided into his seat again.

Unmoved by this interruption and request on the part of his client, Ronald continued his cross-examination searchingly to the end. Mr. Silky put a few questions in re-examination to the plaintiff, and then she quickly resigned her place in the witness-box to 'Ma' Turnover, who at once proceeded to draw upon a somewhat fertile imagination, and indulge in some statements which fairly staggered the unhappy defendant.

Before it came to Ronald's turn to test, by cross-examination, the truth of the evidence adduced by her, Mr. Justice Smotherum shuffled his feet about uneasily, glanced at the clock, coughed, and at last observed—

"As we cannot possibly finish this case to-night" ("and as I badly want a cigar and a rubber at the Club," he added to himself), "perhaps the present stage would be a good one at

which to break off the hearing. I am sitting with my brother Splithairs as a Divisional Court to-morrow; so I shall be unable to resume this cause until the day after, when, if you, gentlemen"—politely indicating the learned Counsel engaged—"can finish before the midday adjournment—er—I—er—" ("can get away to Sandown Park in time for the big hurdle race," *sotto voce*)—"I should feel glad," and with a farewell bob at the Bar, and a sigh of relief, the learned Judge left the Bench.

By the time that Ronald had gathered up his papers and put the tape round them, Travers had already left the Court. Jack Dashwood and Sir Tommy were to dine with Mr. Binkie and Dennison at the hotel that night at 7.30, but it was past eight o'clock when Travers, looking considerably less depressed than he had been throughout the day's proceedings, turned up to play the part of host.

"Everything is going well for us, Travers," said Ronald, as they sat down to table. "I hope you feel more happy in your mind now, eh?"

"Oh, yes, really!" squeaked Binkie, "I'm a doosid deal happier about it than I was. We'll have some pop on the strength of it, won't we? Waiter, bring the wine list—oh! here it is. Heidsick's dry Monopole, eh, dear boys? Or Poll Rogers—oh, no, I see it's Pol Roger—funny, ain't it? Sounds just like the name of some gal, don't it?"

The dinner passed off as successfully as it was to be expected it would, when presided over by a genius so bright, a wit so sparkling, as that of Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie. All the party were in good spirits. The host seemed remarkably pleased with himself; Ronald was very confident that the

upshot of the case would enable him to claim the fulfilment of Mrs. Binkie's promise to consent to his marriage with Penelope; whilst Jack and Sir Tommy were both looking forward with a considerable amount of glee to the prospect of seeing Travers 'dusted over' by Mr. Silky Q.C., when he got him into the box for cross-examination. Rochefoucauld, the great French philosopher, never said anything truer than that 'few things give us greater satisfaction than the misfortunes of our friends.' Reader, we ask solemnly, can you deny it? And especially if you are a hunting man!

But Travers did not give the appearance of one in misfortune, this night. His spirits, as we have said, had wonderfully recovered their tone; he was gay, nay, even hilarious; and after, as he expressed it, 'doing himself proud' on the dry Monopole, he stuck an extremely long cigar in his mouth, winked confidentially at the waiter as he ordered coffee and liqueurs, and then the spirit within moved him to speech, or, as Jack called it, to 'spread himself a bit.'

"Look here, you chappies; I bet there won't be any verdict against me in this case, eh, Ronald?"

Ronald shook his head. "I think we're pretty safe already," he replied, lighting a cigar. Travers again winked knowingly; this time at Tommy's hat, stuck on a side table, and which Mr. Binkie mistook for a waiter. Then he resumed—

"You'll see how I'll bother old Silky when he cross-examines me! And when we've won the case, you chappies must all dine with me at Richmond to celebrate the event, eh? I say, old Mrs. Turnover can tell some whackers, can't she?" and then the subject was dropped, and about midnight the party broke up.

Mr. Justice Smotherum was somewhat late in taking his seat in Court on the morning when the hearing of the Binkie-Turnover case was to be resumed. His Lordship was not in the best of tempers, having backed three seconds, and held shocking hands at whist the previous day. He had made up his mind to hustle this wretched case through quickly, have a lobster and a pint of Moët, and just go down and 'knock the stuffing' out of the Ring at Sandown this afternoon, get back his losses, and a bit to the good besides.

"Turnover against Binkie," cried out the Clerk of the Court.

Mr. Clifford Sinn was present, as representing the plaintiff's interests, whilst Mr. Ronald Dennison again appeared for the defence. Mr. Silky Q.C., had an application to make in another Court, so had not yet come.

'Ma' Turnover was called, but the lady did not answer to her name. Three or four times did the crier yell for "Ann Slumper Turnover!" outside the gloomy corridors; but he exerted his lungs in vain. 'Ma' Turnover was not forthcoming.

"Why isn't the woman here?" growled Mr. Justice Smotherum, testily.

"Perhaps your Lordship would allow me to interpose a witness. Mrs. Turnover may have lost her way in the mazes of the building," ventured Mr. Clifford Sinn tentatively.

"The Court can't be kept waiting for Mrs. Turnover, nor for forty Mrs. Turnovers. Is my time to be wasted just for the convenience of—of—a—of a retail bun-merchant!—a—a—a cakemonger? No, sir; I will be no party to frittering away the time which the public pays for!" (The learned

Judge had quite forgotten, for the moment, his projected quiet little afternoon at Sandown.)

But just as Mr. Clifford Sinn, bending beneath the storm of stern judicial indignation, was wondering what on earth he should do, a rustle at the back of the Court announced the arrival of Mr. Silky, who, in a few hurried words from his Junior, learned the state of the case.

"M'Lud," began the great Queen's Counsel, in his most oily tones, "if y'r Ludship will permit me to make an observation——" but just at this moment the missing witness turned up, and at once went into the box.

"Why were you not here at the right time, woman?" snapped the Judge.

"Well, please your Lordship, I met the defendant outside, and I went up and says to him, I says, 'If you was a gentleman,' I says, 'you'd offer us somethink to settle this case.'"

"That's no excuse for keeping one of Her Majesty's Judges waiting, madam! You should have been here; or, at all events, applied to me for an adjournment, so that you could negotiate with the defendant for a settlement. You can have an adjournment now if you like, to try and settle the matter." (Mr. Justice Smotherum thought this would be rather a good way of getting off to Sandown early.)

"Oh no, thank you, my Lord. It wouldn't be no manner of use. All as he offered me was thirty shillin's and my cab fare 'ome!"

"Silence!" shouted the usher, to drown the noise of ribald laughter arising in the Court.

In something less than ten minutes' cross-examination, Ronald had bowled over the witness no less than three times

as to her statements given on the previous day; and, hot, dishevelled, and angry, 'Ma' Turnover left the box, observing that Mr. Dennison was 'no gentleman.'

One more witness—a wholly unimportant one—completed the case for the plaintiff; and Ronald occupied but a very few minutes in his opening speech, before calling Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie into the witness-box. He briefly examined that gentleman, and then turned him over to the tender mercies of Mr. Smoothe Silky Q.C.

"What are you, Mr. Binkie, may I ask?" began the eminent Counsel, polishing up his glasses with a silk handkerchief as he spoke.

"I'm Trousers—I mean Travers—Travers Binkie, you know. Who did you think I was?" and the vacuous eye fixed itself upon the questioner in stupid wonderment.

Mr. Silky gave a cough of annoyance. "I don't mean that. I want to know what is your business or profession."

"Oh, really! then why didn't you say so?"

"Kindly refrain from cross-examining me, sir, and answer the question. What are you?"

"Well, I suppose I'm a sort of man. I haven't got anything to do, you know. Funny, ain't it?"

"Will you cease putting questions, sir!" broke in the Judge angrily. "You are not here for the purpose of asking conundrums!"

Binkie looked frightened, and endeavoured to concentrate his intellectual forces on the next query of the learned Counsel's.

"Is it a fact, Mr. Binkie, that you are now contemplating matrimony with another lady?"

"Well, you see, I don't quite know; but I think so. If Luty——"

"Answer the question, sir, if you please. Yes or No."

"But I can't, you know; perhaps we shan't be able to agree about the——"

"Are you engaged to be married?"

"Oh, yes. Why didn't you—oh, beg pardon; forgot I mustn't ask questions."

Mr. Silky, despite all his persuasion, varied by bullying here and there, failed to extort anything in the shape of important admissions from Mr. Binkie, for the simple reason that there was really nothing to admit, he never having at any time contemplated making Miss Turnover his wife. In concluding his cross-examination, Mr. Silky asked—

"Then you are prepared to swear that you never made my client an offer of marriage—is that what you say?"

"Yes. I never even thought of it."

"And yet, sir, you write her this letter, in which occur these words!" and the learned Counsel again quoted the last paragraph of Binkie's letter—"You say that you may marry her some day, who knows, etc. Now, in the face of that, do you still say marriage was never contemplated by you?"

"Yes."

"Then how do you explain those words, sir? Why did you ever use them?"

"Oh, because I was in such a beastly funk, you know, that's why. I thought it would stop her going to the lawyer's, you know, if I said that," blurted out Binkie.

"So that when you wrote those words you wrote them with the deliberate intention of deceiving this young woman?"

"Oh, really! I don't know," replied Mr. Binkie feebly.

"Well, sir, I will leave the jury to put their own construction on your conduct!" said Mr. Silky grandiloquently, as he resumed his seat after firing this last Parthian dart.

The trial quickly came to a close with Mr. Justice Smotherum's brief summing up. His Lordship was in a hurry. Already his chance of a seat in the 'special' was gone, and he would have to push along in order to arrive on the course in time for the big race of the afternoon.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, speaking rapidly, and as if he were thoroughly sick of the whole affair, "You have heard the evidence given by the plaintiff's witnesses—er—ha—hum—and if—er—you believe that evidence, and if—er—you think—er—that that evidence contains sufficient corroboration of the story told by the plaintiff herself in relation to this alleged promise, why—er—you will give a verdict in her favour; and if on the other hand you prefer to believe the defendant's version—why—er—your decision will be for him. If you find a verdict for the plaintiff, you will then consider, in the second place, what amount of damages you think will reasonably meet the exigencies of the case. Er—I don't think I could usefully occupy your time any longer" ("and I'm jolly well sure I'm not going to try!" to himself), "so you will now kindly consider your verdict."

Without leaving the box, the jury put their heads together for the space of thirty seconds, at the expiration of which time the foreman rose, and jerked out the words, "Not guilty."

"I suppose, gentlemen, you mean that your verdict is for the defendant?" said the learned Judge. "There is no question of guilt or innocence in the matter."

The foreman blushed, and corrected himself immediately.

“Yes, my Lord. We mean verdict for the defendant.”

“Hooray!” cried Binkie, and almost before he was aware of it, he found himself shot through the door by the outraged usher, who handed his hat out to him a little later on.

“Would your Lordship like a case or two transferred from the next Court to your own list, to try?” asked the Registrar, blandly. “If so I will at once arrange——”

“By no means!” hastily interrupted the learned Judge (“see you d—d first,” he added to himself indignantly, as he rose from the Bench).

And whilst Mr. Binkie was being escorted home to his hotel in triumph by his friends, the fair plaintiff left the Law Courts in hysterics and a four-wheeler.

Little more remains to be told of this veracious history, and within one and the same week the Duke of Haughtyshire, his son and guardian angel, Lord Gravity, Mr. Ronald Dennison, barrister-at-law, and last, but not least, Mr. Travers Algernon Binkie, were duly ‘turned off’ in the parish of Mudbury, and all the higher officials of the Church—by which we mean, of course, the pew-opener, sexton, clerk, and bell-ringers—declared that ‘they wuz r’yal times, they wuz.’ And as not one of this estimable band was sober for at least a fortnight afterwards, we have little doubt but that, from their point of view, ‘they wuz.’

THE END.

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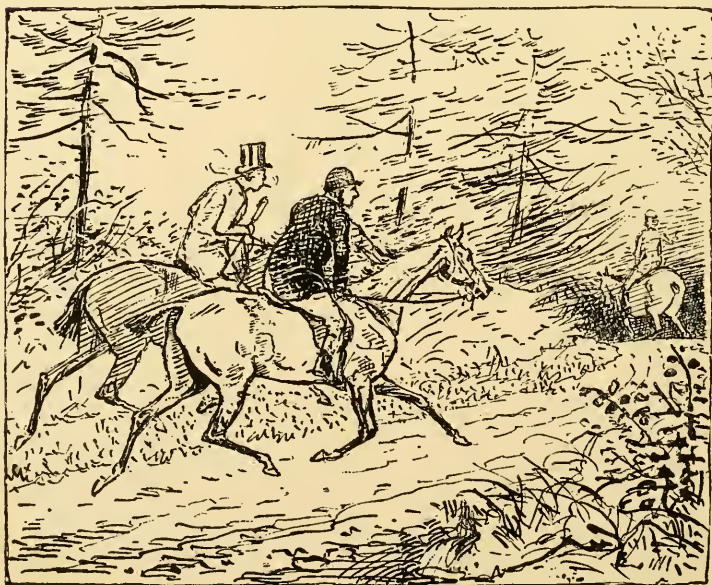
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[For specimen see next page.]

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